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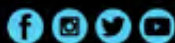


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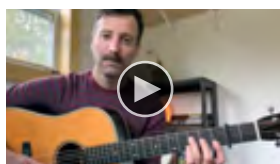
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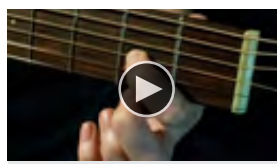
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podcast

Join us for conversations that explore why we play, collect, build, and obsess over guitars and how rewarding it is to make music of our own. Each month, we connect you with great guitarists—from preeminent pickers and fingerstyle sensations, to master teachers, luthiers, songwriters, and the community at large.

In the most recent episode of the Acoustic Guitar Podcast, Diego Figueiredo, Gwenifer Raymond, and Yasmin Williams share their unique perspectives on composing for solo guitar. Listen and subscribe at AcousticGuitar.com/podcast or wherever you get your podcasts!



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THE FRONT PORCH

Al Petteway



COURTESY OF AL PETTEWAY

I'll admit that I spend an inordinate amount of time window shopping for instruments online, and one of the most exciting discoveries I came across last year appeared on the Music Emporium's website in mid-October. Hand-crafted by the master luthiers at Collings, a pair of flamed maple and European spruce 00-sized guitars—one an archtop and the other a flattop—with walnut bindings and Madagascar rosewood appointments stirred in me a powerful desire to acquire new gear. And it occurred to me that this duo, featured here on the cover, is emblematic of how boutique guitar makers are at the top of their game these days—as if it could be any higher.

But this trend is not limited to high-end guitars. As explored in our annual year-in-gear feature, instruments at all price points and with various designs offer quality specs and construction. Eastman's E100SS-SB, for instance, boasts a Sitka spruce top and sapele back and sides—all solid construction—for just \$579. To put that in perspective, in 1990 I bought my first steel-string guitar, a big-name, kind of "meh" import with laminated back and sides, for \$800—around \$1,800 when adjusted for inflation. Though it was among the best available at that price at the time, you can get a much better instrument for quite a bit less money these days.

Just as it is a golden period for guitar making, so too it is for music instruction, and as always, this issue features a range of lessons for all players. If you have wanted to learn to read standard notation but have been intimidated by the prospect, the Basics lesson by Berklee professor Jane Miller, the second of a three-part series, offers an approachable introduction through some simple but satisfying duets that you can play either with a live partner or by recording one of the parts to play along with.

A second Basics lesson, by Austin, Texas-based guitarist and composer David Hamburger, shows you how to delve into the art of soloing through the minor pentatonic scale, making the most of this five-note collection and applying it in a logical and orderly manner to the essential 12-bar blues progression. And in the Here's How department, Doug Young gives advice on exploring open tunings for guitarists accustomed to playing in standard.

For more advanced content, in this issue's Weekly Workout lesson, Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers shows how to create alternate-tuning-like sounds with a partial capo covering just three strings, while New York-based guitarist-composer Charlie Rauh shares how he uses literature, specifically the poetry of Phillis Wheatley Peters, to inspire solo works. Elsewhere in the issue, flatpicking ace Alan Barnosky breaks down Tony Rice's elegant solo on the traditional tune "Banks of the Ohio," as heard on the classic album *Tone Poems* with mandolinist David Grisman.

As we were working on this issue, we received the sad news of Al Petteway's passing. Petteway was a beloved fixture in the acoustic guitar world, known for his congenial manner, beautiful arrangements in all styles, and his seemingly effortless approach to fingerstyle playing. Petteway, who is already greatly missed, offered valued contributions to the magazine over the years. In this issue, we have reprinted his standard tuning arrangement of the traditional favorite "Sidh Beag, Sidh Mor."

I hope that these lessons will challenge and inspire you—and that our annual gear report will help inform your next guitar acquisition.

—Adam Perlmutter

Adam.Perlmutter@Stringletter.com

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GUITAR TALK



REID SIMPSON

Western Journey

From learning banjo rolls as a kid in Japan to studying with jazz greats at Berklee, Hiroya Tsukamoto has arrived at a unique acoustic style

BY EMILE MENASCHÉ

Hiroya Tsukamoto may play the guitar with the skill of a virtuoso, and he may write compelling music that draws from many different cultures and genres, but if I had to choose one word to describe him it would be *orchestrator*.

But not in a typical sense. His orchestration is as much about texture and tone as it is about harmony and structure.

Originally from Kyoto, Japan, and now based in New York, Tsukamoto began composing long before he even picked up a stringed instrument. And when he did, it was the five-string banjo, not guitar, that first captured his imagination. But finding Kyoto a barren landscape for the banjo, the then teenager switched first to acoustic and then electric guitar, eventually coming to the United States on a Berklee scholarship.

Each step of his journey—from composing on the recorder as a grammar school kid to learning banjo rolls to playing electric guitar to studying in of the world's most progressive music programs—has shaped his approach as a composer and performer, as heard on his latest album, *Little River Canyon* (see review at AcousticGuitar.com).

In his live performances, Tsukamoto moves seamlessly through traditional guitar techniques and tonalities but is just as fluent with unusual and surprising textures and voicings. This is especially true when he uses his looping pedal, where fluid melody will sit atop shimmering arpeggios punctuated by notes so staccato that they produce an effect like pitched percussion.

If his music were a canvas, there would be lots of color, but also plenty of white space.

We recently spoke on the phone from his tour stop in Michigan.

Two words that come to mind to describe your playing are *orchestral* and *textural*. How did you develop your voice on the instrument?

I started playing guitar when I was about 15 years old. But my first instrument was a five-string banjo. I practiced a lot of banjo rolls—different patterns and different variations for my right hand. So that stayed with me when I played guitar. I still use a lot of, as you mentioned, texture, and a lot of fast arpeggio patterns.

Do you play with bare fingers, or do you use fingerpicks?

On the banjo, I use fingerpicks, but on the guitar, not that much—usually just bare fingers.

How long did you play the banjo, and why did you switch?

I played for a couple of years. But I came from a small town back in Japan, so there was no way to find an instructor or other players. And then my friends were playing guitar, so I started, too. I still play banjo a little bit, but not so much.

What was your first guitar?

My mother was a schoolteacher, and she bought a—I don't even remember the brand, but it was a Japanese copy of a Martin dreadnought. It was hard to play *[laughs]*!

Were you taking lessons at that point?

I was all self-taught through CDs or records, or sharing ideas with my friends.

Did your personal style develop early on?

I think so. I was a teenager. But I had been composing music since when I was in elementary school. I was more interested in writing than simply playing guitar. I was composing with the recorder in the beginning of my elementary school. I really enjoyed creating something original, even though I was not a good player. I was trying to create or produce different sounds or songs as a teenager.

What was your next big step as a player?

I got an electric guitar when I was in high school. I was more into rock. But at the same time, I was playing acoustic music, so my music was expanding to different genres. I played both solo and in bands with friends.

Who are your main benchmarks as a guitarist and as a composer?

Some of my favorite guitar players who have influenced me are Pat Metheny, Wayne Krantz, Kelly Joe Phelps, Ralph Towner, and Atahualpa Yupanqui. I love Pat Metheny, as he is constantly creating something new as a composer and never stops. I studied with Wayne Krantz, and when I played chords that I thought were cool, he often said to me, "There are so many guitarists who already play those same chords. Think of alternative ways." I learned how to be unique from him.

But I don't particularly listen to guitar music much. I like early ECM records, especially *[those by vibraphonist and composer]* Gary Burton, saxophonists such as Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane, and a lot of South American folk music from Argentina and Brazil. I also like banjo players such as Noam Pikelný and John Hartford, and some of my other influences include classical composers like Aaron Copland and Gerald Finzi.

Did the electric influence your approach to acoustic guitar?

I think a little bit, because I was used to playing in a group for a long time. And when I was playing electric guitar, I was playing melody, like lead. So when I went back to the solo acoustic, I tried to play the melody in a way that it would stand out more.

Your technique is so fluid. Do you have a specific practice routine?

I practice a lot of fundamentals, always. My goal is to make my fingers as flexible as I can, because onstage, I improvise, too.

What was your first good guitar?

I got an Ibanez semi-hollow electric guitar when I was 18 years old. Actually, I had a Telecaster before that with the regular single-coil pickups.

When did you start to gravitate towards the acoustic guitar as your main instrument?

I've been playing acoustic throughout my life. But when I came to the United States, I was playing jazz most of the time. So I kind of stayed away from that. I came back to acoustic about 15 years ago. That was a time when I decided to do a whole show with just one single instrument, an acoustic guitar.

What is your main guitar now?

I mostly play a Martin OM-42 with a Fishman pickup system. I have other similar guitars, too. Today, I flew from New York to Michigan, so I just brought one guitar and it's the Martin OM-42.

This particular instrument has a little story. I had a friend in Atlanta, a Japanese guy. He kept coming to my shows whenever I played in Georgia. He was a very good player, but he got Parkinson's, so he couldn't press the strings anymore. He was thinking about selling his guitar, but he didn't want to sell it to a store. And he was like, if you want to use it, please do. It was about ten years ago that I got this guitar from him. So this instrument has a little legacy.

What year is it?

It's a 2000, I think. Today I'm in Lansing, Michigan, and there's a great guitar store here, Elderly Instruments. My friend got this guitar at Elderly 23 years ago. Today, I went there and one of the guys adjusted his guitar. It was nice—it came full circle.

What are some of your other acoustics?

I have a Martin HD-28 dreadnought and a Huss and Dalton FS. I also have a Larrivée LV-10 and a guitar from Japan by Michita

Hongoh—they're handmade guitars. If I fly to shows, I just use the OM-42, but if I drive, I sometimes bring a second guitar.

Do you use standard or alternate tunings?

I don't use standard tuning in shows. Most of the time I play in DADGAD, because I prefer its open sound. When I was in high school, I was just playing prewar, bottleneck guitar, Robert Johnson kind of stuff—mostly in open G. But I discovered DADGAD myself about 15 years ago. I didn't know anyone else was using it *[laughs]*. It just came to me naturally, so I decided to keep it.

Your ability to bring out different timbres and tones is almost orchestral, especially when you use your looping pedal.

Thank you. Personally, I'm not a big fan of looping the way it's typically used. *[See the November/December 2021 issue for a lesson on Tsukamoto's idiosyncratic use of loopers.]* Because I had an eight-piece band before, and I was doing all the arrangements for different instrumentation, I wanted to create something like that and then play solo. So I tried to use a looping pedal—not for the entire song, but for parts and different sounds, because looping can be boring if overused or doing the same thing over and over. I use it more like an orchestra kind of sound—that's what I'm aiming for.

What kind of looping pedal and other accessories do you use?

I'm using the Boss RC-20. It's one of the oldest looping pedals, but it's still working fine. And I have a mixer that I put next to me. I put a vocal mic into the mixer and feed the guitar into the mixer. And I use the mixer almost like a footpedal sometimes, to change the sound; sometimes I adjust EQ during the song. I also use a K&K Pure Mini preamp and a Strymon Cloudburst ambient reverb pedal. My strings are D'Addario XT Phosphor Bronze light gauge *[.012–.053]*.

What is your approach to composing?

Do you sit and write every day or wait for inspiration?

It varies. Sometimes I try to sit, and sometimes nothing comes. I spend a lot of time on the road traveling to different places, and sometimes music comes to me while traveling. But I need a guitar or the piano to compose. I need to hear myself.

Do you record at home?

Sometimes, but I have kids aged six and nine, so it's kind of hard to do. I try to practice and compose on the road *[laughs]*. **AC**



TOMMY'S PICKS

AUSTRALIAN GUITAR VIRTUOSO TOMMY EMMANUEL SHINES

WITH A TEAM OF TOP ACOUSTIC PLAYERS ON *ACCOMPLICE TWO*

BY ADAM MILLER

When I was growing up in Australia in the 1990s, Tommy Emmanuel was a household name—and not just to guitar players. He was as synonymous with the instrument as legends like Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix and Slash. Early Emmanuel albums like *Dare to Be Different* (1990) and *Determination* (1991) were textbooks on guitar styles, melody, tone, and quality. They were predominately electric guitar outings with a band, but usually included one or two solo acoustic pieces, like “Blue Moon” and “Initiation,” that made me wonder if one person was really playing all that music or if studio tricks were at work.

Emmanuel appeared on our late-night, breakfast, and variety television shows almost weekly, it seemed. He could be seen playing songs from his latest albums or featured as the guest guitar player for a famous Australian pop star on his trusty Telecaster, or ever increasingly on a Maton acoustic.

By the time I was opening shows and touring with Emmanuel in Australia in the early 2000s, he was playing solo acoustic exclusively. These sets were absolutely annihilating, with Emmanuel delivering the impact (and almost the volume) of a full rock band with just one acoustic guitar. We would perform a couple of duets a night, usually “Determination” and “Working Man’s Blues.” Playing on stage with Emmanuel was—and still is—unbelievably daunting, but he is incredibly supportive and generous, with the focus always being about delivering the song to the audience.

It’s no surprise that Emmanuel has turned his hand again to collaboration with his *Accomplice* series of releases, bringing some of the finest acoustic musicians in the world—among them, David Grisman, Sierra Hull, Billy Strings, and Molly Tuttle—into the studio and making the songs the focus. Not long ago, I caught up with Emmanuel via Zoom and chatted about this exciting and collaborative phase of his long career.

How did *Accomplice Two* come about?

I had finished the *Tommysongs* project, and I got playing with Little Feat and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band on a few shows. It was exhilarating and fun, and just great to play with those guys. I got to know them really well and started thinking I’d like to do some things with them.

I also had a few tracks that carried over from the *Accomplice One* project. I had the Roy Book Binder song with Jorma Kaukonen, “Another Man Done a Full Go Round,” and I had “Mama Knows” with Jerry Douglas. I had

“Seven Come Eleven” with David Grisman as well. Michael McDonald had also sent me three songs during Covid.

Then my manager and I decided we’d start a list of artists that we wanted to work with. So I quickly contacted Billy Strings, and he said he would love to do it. I got to play with Molly Tuttle on an Americana music cruise, and so I just rang her and said, “How about we record ‘White Freight Liner Blues?’”

Last year was busy, but things just somehow came together when I was off the road. Brian Penix, my manager, said, “Oh, Nitty are gonna be in town on that day; Little

**‘THAT’S
THE MOST
IMPORTANT
THING—
YOU’VE
GOTTA HAVE
THE RIGHT
SONG!’**

—TOMMY EMMANUEL

Feat are coming through on tour on this day. If we book the studios together there, then we can get them in.” And so he helped me mastermind the whole thing.

You produced the record. Was everyone stepping into your world, or the other way around?

I was totally going into their world. With Nitty Gritty we recorded with us singing vocals and me playing acoustic guitar all live. I got Mike Bub to come in and play upright bass because I wanted a real bluegrass sound on that. And that guy is smoking. He plays on everyone’s records here; he’s brilliant.

The track with Jorma was recorded with no click track—just the two of us sitting there.

When you play a song like “Another Man Done a Full Go Round” with Jorma, he’s off to the races straight away! He’s playing and singing pretty much in the Robert Johnson style, serving the song and the words. So we got a good take on the vocals, and then I played drums on it with this kind of sloppy backbeat. When you listen to the track, it sounds like a bar band playing.

Were you playing with any of these artists for the very first time on these sessions?

Well, I’d never played with Michael McDonald before, but I played on some tracks where he was the singer. Sierra Hull and I did my song “Precious Time.” I went over to her house, and she recorded me playing the song on her phone. I came back the next day, and it sounded like it does on the recording. I just let her do what she does on her old Gibson mandolin, because she’s so good. She’s a great song player—she’s sensitive. She knows when to get into it and when to hold back. She’s like 100 years old, but she’s only 30 or something.

It sounds really deep on the recording in the way her mandolin fits with your guitar. She’s got that incredible touch.

I watch a mandolin player, and they just make it look so easy, with all this music coming out. I’ve tried many times to play the instrument, but I just can’t get my head around that tuning [like a violin, in perfect fifths, G D A E].

Yeah, I suggest the ukulele when someone wants me to play mandolin.

I used to play mandolin on people’s records in Sydney, back in the late ’70s and early ’80s, but in ukulele tuning. I could fool you into thinking I was a real mandolin player.

How did you go about picking the songs for the record?

That’s the most important thing—you’ve gotta have the right song! It all came together pretty naturally. Michael McDonald, for instance, sent me three songs that were all good. “Somebody Like You” gave me a chance to play the hook lines around the piano, and then take a little solo, but still feature him all the way.

The last track on the album, “Far Away Places,” is with Raul Malo from the Mavericks. Raul and I met on a music cruise when he came up to me in a restaurant and said, “I love the way you play ‘Moon River.’ Would you like to do it on the show tonight?” He called me up in the middle of the Mavericks’ set; we did the song completely unrehearsed, and he nailed it 100 percent. I asked him right then to do a track with me. I said, “What do



you like to sing?” And he said, “I like Sam Cooke songs.”

“Far Away Places” was to me an obvious choice, because I had enough up-tempo songs on the album and I needed something beautiful to give us a feel like we’re being serenaded. The way he sings is amazing, not to mention his diction. There’s no pitch control, none of that bullsh*t. This is a real guy singing into a real mic. I worked out the arrangement of the song, and I decided to go with nylon-string for the main rhythm part, steel-string for the melody, and then to just kind of fade into the background. I was fanning across the strings with my [picking-hand] fingers to give it this subtlety.

What about the tracks like your original composition “Mombasa” with Yasmin Williams? Was that your choice?

Yes. When I first met Yasmin about four years ago, our first conversation revolved around “Mombasa” because she loves the song. She doesn’t play anything like I do—she’s a completely unique guitarist—and I said to her, “You just follow me and we’ll just see what happens.” So I start the song off quoting the melody really slowly, and she plays a few things in response on her kalimba. Then I finally get to the point where I set the time up, and she joins right in on her guitar. She takes a solo at the end. I also did a little solo when we recorded it, but when I mixed the track I got rid of mine and made hers the featured one because it’s so different and unique. I kept the time whilst we recorded and added the drum loop afterwards.

What have you learned from collaborating with this variety of musicians?

I think I’m becoming a better listener with age. When I was young, I had ten ideas to throw at you, you know. But now I listen to it to make sure that whatever I play serves the music. When you’re producing something where you want another artist to be the feature, you have to give them the right platform. And that’s the song, and the choice of instruments on the song, and all that stuff.

How do you approach refining the melodies and parts in these songs? Does it happen naturally, or is it something that you work on?

I put my producer’s cap on. I’m thinking outside the box, stepping back and looking at the song. What does it need? That’s why with “Daddy Frank” I quoted the original iconic parts by Roy Nichols, but I did a kind of a slightly bebop- or Western swing-sounding lick

that made it a lot different than the Merle Haggard original. Then I doubled it on the acoustic, and it's just like a little hook thing underneath all the vocals.

You're praised for your jaw-dropping technique, but I think the most amazing thing about you is your ability to interpret a melody.

On a song like "Daddy Frank" that has a great melody, I don't stray too far from the original. But neither did Jamie Johnson, the singer, out of respect for Merle Haggard. He's saying it in his way, but really close to the original. Same with the parts in the bridge; I wanted to stay faithful to the original but add something that was melodic and unique.

How do you prefer to record your acoustics?

With the right engineer! People all think that I must have a lavish house with a big studio, and that couldn't be further from the truth. I have a very simple little home and I use my iPhone's Voice Memo app for my studio—I just put the phone about a foot away from me, don't play too hard, and the demos sound nice. I don't want a studio; I don't have time to go learning how to use all this new technology. I'm interested in working with someone who really knows how to record and make a sound that I really like. I can always hear a bad choice of microphone, or if they're using too much pickup. All that stuff drives me crazy.

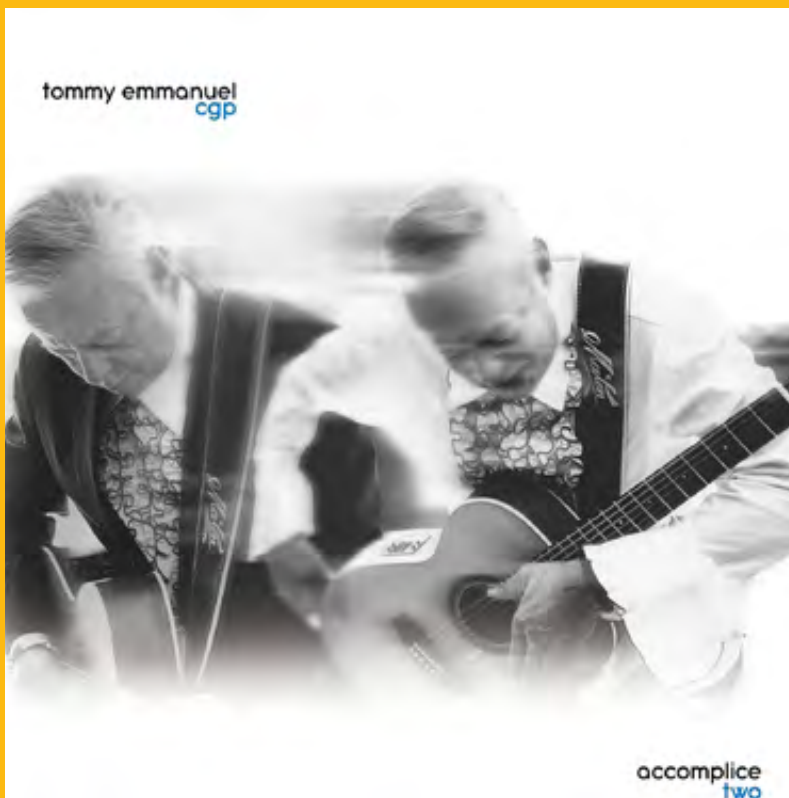
When I turn up at the studio to record with Rory Rositas or Brad Benge, they've already got their choice of microphones and where they think the best placement is. I come in with new strings on the guitar, put the headphones on, sit, and play, and it's already beautiful. With Rory we use a matched pair of [Neumann] KM8s or something like that.

They must be in the piano stereo configuration—getting the high and low strings separated.

You get the top and bottom, yeah. And then about a foot and a half back is an old ribbon mic, which gives an element of grit to everything. I don't know how that works, but you take it away, and it sounds like there's something missing. As soon as you add the old ribbon mic in, it's just like everything is real.

Do you have any plans for future solo releases?

I'm about to start on the next *Tommysongs* project, which would be another double album of 24 original songs. I've also got a couple of new pieces that I'm really happy about, and I can't wait to get in and record. **AC**



WHAT HE PLAYS

On *Accomplish Two*, Emmanuel used a wide range of acoustic guitars. On the tracks with Molly Tuttle and Billy Strings, he played his Pre-War 000-28. "It's an exact replica of David Grisman's Martin 000-28 from 1930," Emmanuel says, "except it's louder and more in tune."

On "Precious Time" and "Mama Knows," he used a Larrivée C10 that Jean Larrivée gave him when he was working with Chet Atkins in Nashville years ago. On many other songs, Emmanuel used his Maton TE Personal.

All of his steel-string guitars are set up with his signature Martin strings: MA540FX Tommy's Choice Authentic Flexible Core 92/8 phosphor bronze, .012–.054.

On the *Accomplish Two* tracks with Michael McDonald and Raul Malo, Emmanuel played a custom Kirk Sand nylon-string custom made with flamenco tonewoods—maple and other light-colored woods.

Onstage, Emmanuel's main guitar is his Maton TE Personal, with Queensland maple back and sides and a spruce top. He has several other Matons in his stage arsenal, including a cutaway Australian, an experimental model built by former head Maton luthier Andy Allen with a carbon fiber–reinforced neck. Emmanuel keeps that guitar in G6 tuning (D G D G B E), which he learned from Chet Atkins.

"I also play a low-tuning guitar I call the Mega Mouse," Emmanuel says. "It's similar to the TE Personal, except it's a jumbo size. That guitar sounds killer." The Mega Mouse has heavy strings—D'Addario nickel bronze, .013–.056—and is tuned to dropped D, down a whole step to C G C F A D.

All his stage guitars use the Maton AP5 Pro pickup system.

"My only other gear," Emmanuel adds, "is an AER Pocket Tools Dual Mix preamp and an Udo Roesner Da Capo 75 combo amp. And a tuner!" —AM

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Rising classical
virtuoso Plínio
Fernandes explores
the music of his native
country through
a Baroque lens

BY MARK SMALL



Classical guitarist Plínio Fernandes has long been attracted by the aura of London—some 5,800 miles away from his native São Paulo, Brazil. His desire to move to the Brit capital for college music studies ultimately led him to launch an international touring and recording career there. He signed a multi-album contract with the prestigious Decca Gold label in 2021, at just 27 years old, and in 2023 joined the roster of Askonas Holt, one of the classical world's premier artist management firms. With the recently inked deal, Fernandes joins the company of historic guitar giants Andrés Segovia, Julian Bream, and John Williams, and some of the world's most revered classical conductors, instrumentalists, and vocalists that Askonas Holt has represented.

On *Bacheando*, his sophomore album for Decca, Fernandes continues defining his musical voice. As on *Saudade*, his 2022 debut recording, *Bacheando* draws a line between the traditional and popular Brazilian sounds Fernandes grew up with and music by J.S. Bach (one of Fernandes' favorite composers), whose influence resonates with Brazilian composers across the stylistic spectrum.

The new recording includes the widely played benchmark of the guitar canon, Bach's Prelude, Fugue, and Allegro, and Bach's Adagio from Concerto in D Minor BWV 974. The latter appears in a masterful transcription by Latin Grammy-winning composer/arranger/guitarist Sérgio Assad, a fellow São Paulo native who also contributed to *Saudade*. Assad arranged five tracks for *Bacheando* and composed *Preludio, Fuga, e Vivace*, a nod toward Bach that featured Assad's first foray into fugue writing.

Bach's effect on Brazilian popular music can be detected in the lyrical "Bachianinha No. 1" and rhythmic "Bachianinha No. 2/ Araponga" by bossa nova guitarist and singer Paulinho Nogueira. "Jequibach," a Brazilian-flavored excursion in 5/4 by pianist-composer Mario Albanese, also reveals the Baroque master's influence in its contrapuntal momentum. The disc's final cut is Assad's arrangement of the Preludio from *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 4* by Brazil's most famous classical composer: Heitor Villa-Lobos. Throughout, Fernandes plays brilliantly with warmth, precision, and a burnished tone.

During a Zoom call from London, Fernandes spoke enthusiastically about the new album. He also shared the back story about his motivation to relocate to the UK and the auspicious career opportunities now unfolding before him.

Did you start out playing Brazilian popular music on the guitar?

Many people assume I started playing bossa nova, samba, and choros, but it was the other way around. I was a classical guitarist from the first note. I was playing with a footstool, in classical position, and being very serious about it. I had a classical foundation from the start.

Did your early teachers help you develop the consistent, polished sound you produce on the guitar?

I studied in São Paulo with a great teacher named Henrique Pinto who also taught Fabio Zanon, João Luiz, Douglas Lora, and others of the rising generation. Pinto was really obsessed

'Many people assume I started playing bossa nova, samba, and choros, but it was the other way around. I was a classical guitarist from the first note.'

—PLÍNIO FERNANDES

with sound. He used to say, "Music is made of sound; if the quality of sound is not one of the priorities, I don't know what is." That stayed with me. Fabio's sound is one of the most remarkable things, and when I studied with him, we worked a lot on that. So sound quality is one of the things I focus on the most.

What prompted you to leave Brazil to attend the Royal Academy of Music in London for your undergraduate and master's degrees?

I was fascinated with London as a city while I was growing up, and there were many reasons why I wanted to go to there. I loved football and began watching the Premier League when I was nine and was following the games of the Chelsea Football Club. I also had an Iron Maiden phase and was listening to metal. So there were many different connections to London for me!

But the main reason I decided to come here was because Fabio, my teacher for three years in Brazil, had studied at the Royal Academy of Music before becoming a visiting professor there. I told him I wanted to study abroad, and he suggested that attending the Royal Academy made the most sense for me.

My main teacher was Michael Lewin, who is phenomenal and has taught there for about 40 years. I studied at the Royal Academy for six years, from 2014 to 2020. I also studied with both Fabio and David Russell, who came there as visiting professors during that time.

Many classical guitarists enter competitions hoping a win will help them launch a career. After your studies at the Royal Academy, did you want to do competitions?

I entered competitions until I was 17 and won six national prizes in Brazil. Competitions pushed me to learn new pieces that pushed my limits. I had it in mind to prepare myself during my undergraduate and master's studies to enter the GFA or Koblenz competitions. But in early 2020, after the pandemic came, I started becoming more active on social media. Then I got signed to Decca. At that point, it didn't make any sense for me to do competitions because they don't really integrate you into the real world of concert playing, and that's the direction I wanted to go in.

How did your contract with Decca Gold come about?

It was through my collaboration with cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason on "Scarborough Fair." He invited me to record the song for his second album for Decca Classics. That recording went viral and got 23 million streams on Spotify. The president of Universal Classics and Jazz in the U.S. was very interested to find out who I was. I was actively posting things on social media at the time, and he got in touch. Things went well, and he wanted to sign me to a multi-album deal. I am super thankful for that moment and opportunity. I'm very lucky to be signed to a major label.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason is an amazing player who captured worldwide attention after performing at the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. How did you connect with him?

I've known Sheku for a long time. His sister [pianist Isata Kanneh-Mason] started at the Royal Academy when I started in 2014 and we became close friends. Sheku came to the academy later. He's one in a family of seven siblings that are all phenomenal musicians. Sheku had won the BBC Young Musician of the



Year award in 2016 and became a well-known figure. But playing at the royal wedding gave him intergalactic fame.

You featured him on your album *Saudade*, playing the Villa-Lobos *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5*. Was that piece on the program when you toured together this past fall?

Yes. We also premiered Leo Brouwer's *Sonata for Cello and Guitar*, which we commissioned. It's called *The Magic Space*, has three movements, and is very beautiful. We also played

the Sonata for Cello and Guitar by Radamés Gnattali, *Elegie à une mémoire oubliée*; a work written for us by Rafael Marino Arcaro; and two pieces by Astor Piazzola. The encore was the arrangement of "Scarborough Fair" that we recorded for Sheku's album.

I really enjoyed your rendition of Bach's Prelude, Fugue, and Allegro on *Bacheando*. You play the first two movements very thoughtfully, introspectively, and then the Allegro has a wonderful drive. Every note

in the counterpoint comes out clearly, and you do some nice push and pull within the bar lines while maintaining a consistent tempo overall.

I wanted the piece to breathe and speak well, without lagging or rushing. The fugue has a lot of polyphony, and it's vital to show everything that's happening as opposed to just playing it like a fantasia. I made my arrangement [of all three movements] after looking at several other versions. I put them in the blender and added some changes of my own that I thought worked well.

Since you use a capo on the first fret, the piece sounds in Bach's original key of E \flat . We are so used to hearing guitar music in the sharp keys that this provides a sonic contrast to other pieces on the album.

There's a special color to each key, and we don't really hear that on the guitar too often. For the Bach Concerto in D minor, I also put the capo on the first fret to add something different. It enlarges the coloristic palette of the music.

Have you thought about the direction you'll take for future projects?

I don't have much to say about what direction I will go in. I just want to be inventive with the programming. The industry has changed since the days when the next move for me might have been to do an all Villa-Lobos album with the preludes, etudes, and his guitar concerto. I want to do something that is true for me as an artist and engaging for the audience. I need to find something that makes sense for me but is also inventive. Sérgio Assad says that these days there is room to create very interesting programming and to have your own voice.

Do you have a vision for what your career might look like in the years ahead?

I just want to have an all-around career doing the things I like best: recording, playing solo recitals, doing concertos with orchestras, and playing chamber music with musicians I admire. I'm also passionate about music education and about working with living composers. As guitarists, we don't really have a big repertoire of pieces written by major composers. The challenge is to convince great living composers who are relevant to write good music so people will keep on looking toward the guitar. The greats like Williams, Bream, and Segovia did this, and I think it's very important that it continue. I'm very glad that I have this platform so I can keep commissioning music and showing that the guitar is the most wonderful instrument.

AC



WHAT HE PLAYS

Plínio Fernandes currently plays a 2004 Jeffrey Elliott guitar with Brazilian rosewood back and sides, a spruce top, and a 650mm scale length. For strings, he alternates between Augustine's Regal and Imperial sets with medium-tension trebles and hard-tension basses. —MS



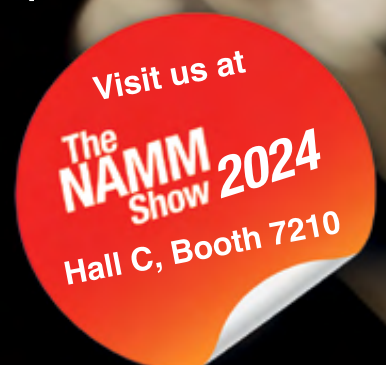
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Collings C10 and AT-00

2023 THE YEAR IN GEAR

A plethora of stunning new guitars at all price points, plus smart amps, pedals, and more

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

It has become a cliché to say that we are living in a golden era of lutherie. Yet, with each passing year, that sentiment rings truer than ever. Guitar makers, both industry giants and boutique artisans, continue to push the boundaries of design and quality. In 2023, just as in recent years, they delivered a diverse array of instruments paying homage to the rich history of the acoustic guitar while propelling it forward. C.F. Martin & Co., for instance, left enthusiasts in awe with their note-perfect replication of the highly sought-after 1937 D-28. Meanwhile, Taylor Guitars sparked contemplation about the future of tonewood resources by incorporating urban ironbark in select models.

In this annual year-in-gear retrospective, we take you on a tour of the exciting new acoustic guitars and accessories introduced in 2023. This selection encompasses instruments tailored to suit a wide spectrum of playing styles, catering to everyone from the budget-conscious to those willing to invest five figures

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS



Clockwise from top left: Martin D-28 Authentic 1937 Aged, Bourgeois Country Boy/TS D and OM, Taylor Builder's Edition 814ce, Epiphone Chris Stapleton Frontier

in their passion. But we're not just here to talk at you. We've also gathered reader quotes about some of your best gear scores from last year—all of which offer further evidence of this golden era.

NEW OFFERINGS FROM LEGACY MAKERS

It is thrilling, to say the least, to see the lineup that the venerable C.F. Martin & Co. releases each year, and 2023 was no exception. The legacy guitar maker treated its iconic dreadnought to a handful of new models. Available in both D-18 (\$2,399 street) and D-28 (\$2,799) versions, the **StreetLegend** dreads look decades old, thanks to the digital micro-burst printing that mimics the appearance of the soundboards from historic models in the Martin museum. Whatever you make of this technology, the guitars look undeniably cool and deliver the rich and rumbling tones that Martin dreads are prized for.

For instruments with actual physical distressing, Martin introduced the **D-18 and D-28 Authentic 1937 Aged** (\$7,999 and \$8,999,

respectively, a fraction of the cost of a clean original), each with a lightly antiqued cosmetic treatment, an Adirondack spruce top, and hot hide glue construction. (While the D-18 is built using the historically correct mahogany back and sides, the D-28 swaps out Guatemalan rosewood for the Madagascar that Martin had been using in place of Brazilian on its Authentic models.)

At the lower end of the price spectrum, the sapele **000CJR-10E StreetMaster** (\$749) also boasts a fashionably distressed treatment, along with a Venetian cutaway and Fishman Sonitone electronics, which make it a great gig-ready option. The same goes for the boldly asymmetric **SC-10E** (\$999), now available in sapele, with its ergonomic neck and body and Fishman MX-T electronics.

Martin usually introduces at least one model each year that is particularly eye-catching or artsy, and for 2023 this included the **OM Biosphere** (\$2,229)—the soundboard of which is emblazoned with a full-color ocean scene by visual artist Robert Goetzl. Made

with an FSC-certified Sitka spruce top and sapele back and sides, the guitar is entirely devoid of plastic components and comes in a sustainable hemp gig bag, reflecting Martin's support of coral reef preservation and of the fight against climate change in general. At the same time, Martin introduced not one but two new 20th-anniversary John Mayer models—the **OMJM** (\$3,999) and **OM-45** (\$18,499), each featuring a distinctive, charcoal-colored sunburst top.

Taylor Guitars has long built instruments with sustainability in mind, going so far as to buy an ebony mill in Cameroon in 2011, and more recently used wood salvaged from the urban canopies in Southern California for select models. Among many other new offerings, Taylor revamped its **100 series** with solid Sitka and layered sapele models (\$799 each), and the **500 Series** (from \$3,299) now includes several guitars made with urban iron-bark back and sides and torrefied spruce tops. The company also expanded its relatively affordable, all-solid **American Dream** series



Clockwise from top left: Gibson's Murphy Lab Acoustic Collection, Guild F-40, Collings custom 0001 12-Fret and SoCo 16 LC baritone thin-line electric, Bourgeois Commemorative 10,000th OM-45 Style Custom

with several sunburst Sitka spruce and walnut models, and others built with mahogany and sapele (all from \$1,799).

The 814ce has for many years been Taylor's flagship guitar, and the model saw two interesting twists for 2023. With a dark opaque finish on its Sitka spruce soundboard, contrasted by maple binding and natural rosewood back and sides, the **814ce Blacktop Special Edition** (\$4,099) is quite the looker. So too is the new **Builder's Edition 814ce** (\$4,499), which finds the company exploring subtle changes to the guitar's basic design in response to dwindling supplies of classic tonewoods. While the two-piece back and the sides are made from the customary Indian rosewood, the Adirondack spruce top is built not from two pieces but four—a design that Taylor thinks will become increasingly common as good-quality spruce of all types becomes more difficult to source in the appropriate widths.

In an opposite direction, revisiting some of its most endearing flattop designs, Gibson intro-

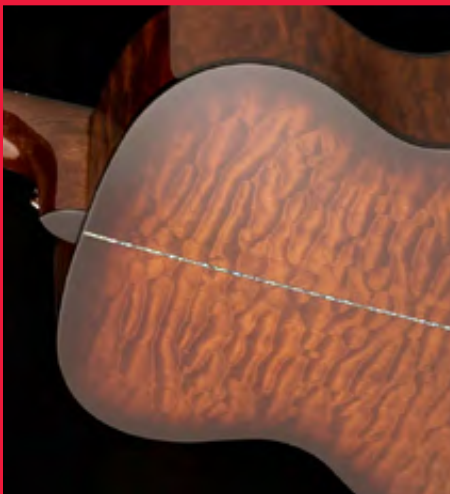
duced the **Murphy Lab Acoustic Collection** (from \$5,499). Comprised of the 1933 L-00, 1942 Banner J-45, 1942 Banner Southern Jumbo, 1957 SJ-200, and 1960 Hummingbird models, all with torrefied tops, the guitars are all built to historic specs in Gibson's newly expanded factory in Bozeman, Montana. They are then lightly aged by Tom Murphy, well known in the industry for his artful distressing work on Gibson electric guitars.

Gibson also unveiled some eye-catching signature models, like the **Miranda Lambert Bluebird** (\$4,649), an indigo take on the classic Hummingbird, and the **Keb' Mo' "3.0" 12-Fret J-45** (\$4,299)—as the name indicates, a 12-fret version of the classic 14-fret workhorse. Similarly, Gibson's sibling company Epiphone unveiled the limited-edition, U.S.-made **Chris Stapleton Frontier** (\$4,999), a square-shoulder dreadnought with AA figured maple back and sides, a thermally aged Sitka spruce soundboard, and an elaborate pair of engraved pickguards.

To celebrate its 70th anniversary, another storied American guitar maker, Guild, released versions of the classic **D-40**, **D-50**, and **F-40** models (from \$2,399), built in Oxnard, California. Each guitar sports a Sitka spruce top with scalloped Adirondack braces, as well as a newly formulated, super thin nitrocellulose lacquer finish for a vintage appearance. These models are available in natural and sunburst finishes; a particularly lovely option on the D-40 and F-40 is the Pacific Sunset Burst, which is inspired by the colorful sunsets in Southern California.

ARTISTRY IN SOUND

As some of the major boutique companies reach the half-century mark, their guitars seem to be getting even richer-sounding, better designed, and more finely crafted than ever. Evidence in support of this anecdotal observation was on display throughout the year, with guitars that showcased the artistry of builders like Bourgeois, Santa Cruz, and Collings at their finest.



Clockwise from top left: Lava Music Blue Lava guitar, D'Angelico Excel Gramercy, Taylor 362ce, Tie Guard Soundboard Protector, PRS SE T55E

YOUR YEAR IN GEAR

In an online survey, we asked readers what some of their favorite gear purchases in 2023 were. Here are some of the instruments and other products that stoked inspiration this year.

I stumbled upon a small company called Rosette Guitar Products that offers products and accessories for nylon-string guitars. With the **Tie Guard Soundboard Protector**, I am more confident when changing strings because I am not concerned about getting dings on the soundboard. —*Char Claassen*

A **Taylor 362ce** 12-string. The playability and the warm yet chimey sound fit so well in a band and sonically inspires me. —*Ken Green*

A **Lava Music Blue Lava** guitar that has reignited my love for playing. Love this smart guitar! — *Jake Jacobs*

I love my recently acquired **Martin HD-28**, which has inspired me to delve into my love of bluegrass! And I have an **Emerald** [carbon fiber guitar] on order—I like having a guitarsenal of inspiration to choose from each day. —*Lahra Marino Svare*

A **Martin M-36**, which I like for its dreadnought-like volume with OM-sized comfort. I will be installing a **K&K Pure Mini** passive pickup on the M-36 soon. —*Don Martin*

A recent **Epiphone Inspired by Gibson J-45**. I play primarily country music from the mid-1920s through the early 1950s. This guitar provides a solid base for much of that music, especially the Depression-era music. It delivers a rich warmth, while at the same time being able to provide a certain “cheapness” that is authentic as all get-out! —*Robert Laplander*

My new **Taylor 214ce-N** is all I've played for three months. —*Howard B. Owens III*

I just got a new **D'Angelico Excel Gramercy**, and the sounds are so sweet and tender but still with some punch, plus the guitar looks absolutely stunning. It's making me want to start writing some songs! —*Ruby Leigh*

My new **PRS SE T55E**, which has beautiful flame maple back and sides with Sitka spruce top and lots of abalone inlay. It plays extremely well and with great tone. —*Randy Reecer*

I got a **Furch OM-SR** and I absolutely love it. It's the perfect companion for my Gibson J-45. I hardly ever play any of my other guitars and am getting ready to sell most because I never pick them up anymore. —*Jim Ross*



Clockwise from top left: building the Santa Cruz Vault series, Breedlove TB Vintage Edition Blues Orange Concertina M1, Eastman E100SS-SB, Cort Gold-Passion, Fender Highway Series

At the NAMM show in April, Bourgeois displayed the Commemorative 10,000th OM-45 Style Custom. This ultra-opulent offering was made from master-grade Adirondack spruce and Brazilian rosewood, a figured mahogany neck, and English holly bindings, along with ornate but tasteful 18-karat solid gold purfling and inlays. Bourgeois, which received Maine's 2023 Manufacturer of the Year award, also continued to make its designs more accessible by adding the **Country Boy/TS OM** and **D** (\$2,699 each) models to its recently introduced Touchstone line of guitars, which are voiced at the company's Maine shop and completed by Eastman Guitars in China.

Having debuted a series of striking one-off guitar pairs in 2022, Collings did the same last year. The Austin, Texas-based maker unveiled a custom **0001 12-Fret** with a sinker rosewood top and koa back and sides, matched with a **SoCo 16 LC baritone** thin-line electric (\$30,000 for the pair). Collings also came out with a stunning **AT-00**

archtop and matching **C10** flattop (\$45,000), both made from exquisitely flamed maple and European spruce and incorporating walnut binding and Madagascar rosewood fretboard, bridge, and headstock veneer, with an elegant, bound Madagascar pickguard on the AT-00.

At the 2023 IBMA Bluegrass Live! Show, in Raleigh, North Carolina, Collings displayed its **Builder's Edition Traditional** dreadnought and OM models, and these prototypes have made a splash with pickers like Bob Minner and Jake Workman. While the Builder's Edition models have yet to make an official debut, they speak to Collings' ongoing quest to explore new voicings and tonal flavors in its existing lineup.

Meanwhile in California, Santa Cruz Guitar Company's charismatic leader, Richard Hoover, looked back on his long life in lutherie and set out to make a new series of guitars called **the Vault**. The name is a reference to opening the private tonewood reserves Hoover has been building up for

the last half century—much of it with a special story. Hoover's most recent find, for instance, was some Brazilian rosewood salvaged from the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, in Pennsylvania. This remarkable wood had been used for adornments on the interior of the church during its construction, between 1913–1919, and a leftover portion had been carefully stored in a stone building in ideal conditions for a century until Hoover recently acquired it.

At press time, Santa Cruz was building a quartet of instruments made from a selection of these prized woods, including a **D** model featuring the Bryn Athyn Brazilian rosewood back and sides and Fort Ross Chapel redwood top; **H13** with ancient kauri back and sides and San Lorenzo purple sinker redwood top; **Firefly** with micro-flamed walnut sides and back and ancient sinker bald cypress top; and **OM** with master grade Brazilian rosewood and ancient Sitka spruce top.

All four guitars will feature intricate but tasteful ornamentation, much of it newly

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS

designed for the series, including jewels embedded under headstock windows—a diamond on the D, ruby on the H13, emerald on the Firefly, and sapphire on the OM.

Like Santa Cruz and other boutique guitar makers, Breedlove has long placed an emphasis on using sustainable tonewoods, both in the instruments crafted in its Oregon custom shop and in its more affordable imported lines. One of Breedlove's new U.S.-made offerings, the striking **TB Vintage Edition Blues Orange Concertina M1** (\$4,999) is inspired by company owner Tom Bedell's personal guitar. It is built using local Oregon figured myrtlewood for the top, back, and sides—accented with figured maple binding and spalted maple purfling—and is outfitted with an L.R. Baggs M1 soundhole pickup.

SMART AND AFFORDABLE GUITARS

Just as prices for fine guitars reach stratospheric levels, instruments at the lower end of the price spectrum continue to offer more bang for the buck than ever—along with modern enhancements and new, player-friendly designs and features that make both learning and gigging easy.

Fender's new **Highway Series** offers an excellent example of this trend. Selling for \$999.99 each, the Highway guitar is available in dreadnought or parlor size, with a solid Sitka spruce or mahogany top on a thin and ergonomically sculpted chambered mahogany body, and a Stratocaster-style bolt-on neck. While the guitars are said to have a surprising amount of acoustic resonance for their size, they are equipped with Fishman's Fluence pickup system, which, working in tandem with floating X bracing, makes for a realistic and feedback-resistant acoustic tone when plugged in.

Cort introduced several acoustics that take inspiration from much costlier boutique designs. The new flagship model is the modern concert-sized **Gold-Passion** (\$1,499), which has a torrefied solid Engelmann spruce top; solid AAA maple back and sides; hard maple, walnut-reinforced neck; smoothly beveled cutaway; gold mother-of-pearl inlay throughout; and L.R. Baggs Anthem electronics.

In a more traditional vein, Eastman introduced steel-strings like the all-solid **E10M-Special** (\$779), a 000 with thermocured spruce top and quilted sapele back and sides, also available in dreadnought size (**E1D-Special**, \$799). Sapele is also seen in the new **E10OSS-SB** (\$579), patterned after Gibson's L-00 size, which has a solid Sitka spruce soundboard and an even more agreeable price tag.

AC



AMPLIFICATION AND ACCESSORIES

While 2023 saw an almost overwhelming number of new guitar designs, there were also some notable new releases of amps, electronics, and accessories.

Boss introduced a new amplifier designed for an immersive experience for acoustic stringed instruments. The **AC-22LX** (\$399.99, see review on page 76) is a compact, two-channel stereo amp that can emulate the sound of twin microphone configurations in studio settings, among many other useful modern features.

L.R. Baggs has long been known for its top-quality acoustic electronics, and the California-based company revealed the **Hi-Fi** bridge plate system (\$199). This noninvasive option can be used on any guitar and includes a pair of peel-and-stick bridge plate sensors that are designed to capture a more dynamic and natural image of an acoustic guitar's sound than soundboard-mounted or undersaddle pickups.

Another electronics giant, Fishman, rolled out the **AFX** line of mini effects pedals tailored to the acoustic guitar—the **Pocket Blender** mixer, A/B/Y, and D.I. (\$89.95); **AcoustiVerb** reverb (\$119.95); **Broken Record** looper and sampler (\$119); and **Pro EQ** preamp with graphic equalizer (\$119.95). (See a review of all four in the November/December 2023 issue.)

D'Addario, the leading string maker, came out with some thoughtful accessories. The **Comfort Leather Auto Lock** strap (from \$39.99)—available in black, tan, and brown leather, and in two- or three-inch widths—offers a classic look with modern convenience and protection. For changing strings or even performing a setup on the fly, the **Universal Neck Rest** (\$14.99) provides a good and stable place to rest a guitar neck without damaging the finish.

Speaking of maintenance, MusicNomad's new **String Change Tool Kit** (\$29.99) is a six-piece bundle containing everything from a bridge-pin puller to nut and saddle lubricant to a heavy-duty string cutter.

Taylor Guitars' **Beacon Tuner** (\$49.95) is a small digital device that clips on the headstock, is easy to read with its relatively large display, and also includes a metronome, timer, clock and a flashlight—which can really save you on a gig. —AP

In DADGAD tuning you can play string 3, fret 2, to form a D power chord

HERE'S HOW



BILL EVANS

Opening Up

Getting into the realm of alternate tunings

BY DOUG YOUNG

Alternate tunings are a great way to spice up your playing and find new inspiration. It may seem intimidating to change all the notes that you've worked so hard to learn, but it doesn't have to be difficult, and the rewards are new sounds and new ideas. You can get started with any guitar you have, steel or nylon, and it's not necessary to use different strings. A chromatic tuner can be helpful. Here are a few tips to get you started on the path.

1 BREAK THE ICE WITH DROPPED D

Lowering your sixth string a whole step so that it sounds an octave below the fourth string puts you in dropped D, an easy and effective introduction to alternate tunings. Everything but string 6 remains the same as standard tuning, so you can continue to use chord shapes and scales you already know. But strumming an open D chord across all six strings gives you a huge sound instead of the relatively weak D chord in standard tuning.

Having octave Ds on strings 4 and 6 provides strong bass support as you play higher up the neck in the key of D. Just remember to adjust any chords that use the sixth string, playing that string two frets higher than in standard. For example, you can form an open G chord by fretting string 6, fret 5, and string 1, fret 3; and muting string 5.

2 TUNE TO A MAJOR CHORD

A string configuration like open G (lowest string to highest, D G D G B D) or open D (D A D F# A D) is so named because the open strings are tuned to a chord. Open G is a beautiful and accessible tuning that is easy and fun to explore. You can access the I, IV, and V chords in the key of G by playing the open strings and then barring at the fifth and seventh frets, making it a great tuning for playing slide.

For a classic open-G sound, play the open strings, then form what would be a two-finger

Am7 chord in standard tuning. Also try sliding that shape up to the third fret. Once you are comfortable with open G, you can replicate many of the same sounds in open D simply by shifting the shapes over by one string. You can also try their sad-sounding counterparts, open G minor (D G D G B \flat D) and open D minor (D A D F A D).

3 EXPLORE SUS TUNINGS

Another common type of tuning replaces the major or minor third with a suspended fourth or second. The most popular example is DADGAD. The open strings in the key of D are all roots and fifths, except string 3, which is the fourth in the key of D, creating a more ambiguous, unsettled sound.

You can find the I, IV, and V chords in DADGAD using just one finger. Play string 3, fret 2, to form a D power chord; string 5, fret 2, for a G chord; and string 4, fret 2, for A7sus4 (omitting string 6). It's easy to find



melodies in the key of D in DADGAD because the notes of the D major scale occur on the open strings and at the second and fourth frets across all six strings.

Other common sus tunings include C G D G C D (aka Orkney), E A D E A E (E7sus4), and D A D E A D (Dsus2).

4 LEVERAGE WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW

Many tunings can be related to some tuning you are already familiar with, like standard. For example, in open G, dropped D, and standard, strings 2, 3, and 4 are all tuned the same. In open G, the remaining strings have been lowered by a whole step (the equivalent of two frets) from standard.

So, if you wanted to find a way to play an Am7 chord in open G, you could start by fingering that two-finger open shape you know in standard tuning. The notes will be correct on the middle strings. You'll just need to move the notes on strings 1 and 5 up by two frets.

5 EMBRACE THE UNKNOWN AND UNUSUAL

A big reason to use an alternate tuning is to get unique chord voicings that would be difficult to achieve in standard, so don't spend too much effort trying to exactly replicate standard tuning chord sounds. For example, the I, IV, and V chords described above for DADGAD sound different than their standard tuning counterparts. That's the whole point—to get new fresh sounds.

Don't be afraid to explore. Find a shape that sounds nice and try moving it around the fretboard to see how it sounds against the open strings. Just put your fingers down in random places and see what sounds come out. Remember that a shape that sounds dissonant when strummed may sound quite nice when arpeggiated or fingerpicked.

6 FOCUS ON INTERVALS INSTEAD OF CHORDS

Ringing open strings are part of the appeal of open tunings, so we tend to focus less on complete six-string chord shapes or barre chords. For example, in DADGAD tuning, play string 6, fret 5, and string 3, fret 4; arpeggiate across the strings, skipping the fifth. Now move that shape up two frets (to string 6, fret 7, and string 3, fret 5), again including open strings. We can think of those two shapes as G and Am, although the chords are in fact more complex variations.

For other interesting sounds, move that shape all over the fretboard, allowing the fretted strings and open strings to interact.

7 LEARN OR ARRANGE A POPULAR SONG IN AN ALTERNATE TUNING

A good way to go beyond just noodling with open strings is to learn a specific song with its defined harmony and melody. Pick a three-chord folk tune, or a pop hit that you know, and find the chords in a new tuning, using your ear or your knowledge of basic harmony to work out fingerings. There are also free chord charts online for almost any alternate tuning.

8 USE YOUR EARS

When in standard tuning, it's easy to fall

into a rut and mindlessly play what falls under our fingers. One fun aspect of alternate tunings is that our go-to shapes and patterns are disrupted. Find something that sounds nice just by randomly noodling in an alternate tuning. Then stop and listen. What do your ears tell you the next note or chord should be? Hear it first, then go find it. Being lost can help you consciously create melodies and chord progressions rather than relying on well-worn patterns.

Of course, the only rule is to have fun exploring a changed musical landscape, so dive in and see what you can create! **AG**

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COURTESY OF JANE MILLER

Two's Company

The second lesson in a series on learning to sight-read through duets

BY JANE MILLER

THE PROBLEM:

You have delved into sight-reading and are starting to get the hang of it, but would like to sharpen your skills.

THE SOLUTION:

Continue to play duets with a guitar buddy, this time with music that is a bit more complex.

The first lesson in this three-part series showed how to interpret written notation using its associated clues. A circled number refers to the string (high E is the first string), an uncircled number above a note is the fingering number (1-4 for first finger through fourth), and a Roman numeral above the staff indicates the position for your fretting hand, named by the location of your first finger.

In this lesson, we'll play duets that feature counterpoint examples, as well as some triple-stops (three notes played at the same time).

We'll be using the same melody and basic composition throughout this series. Remember to trade roles so that you and your duo partner get a chance to play both parts.

1 SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

Example 1 gets us started by training our ears and fingers to get used to two distinctly different parts played together with a duet partner. In counterpoint, two or more melodies are related harmonically, but the notes and rhythms are different from each other. We're in the key of G major, so we'll continue to use the second position, shown by the Roman numeral II.

The first (higher) guitar part is the same melody used in the previous lesson, while the second is simply an ascending G major scale in measure 1, followed by a harmony line in the next bar. The rhythm of the scale played by the second guitar is all eighth notes, while

the first guitar is sticking to the rhythm of the original melody. It's important for both players to trust their own reading while listening to each other for cues and tempo consistency. In measure 2, the second guitarist has to wait to come in with the eighth note on the "and" of beat 2, while the first player has a note right on beat 2.

2 THE SUPPORTING ROLE

Example 2 introduces the triple-stops. They may look complicated at first glance, but you'll find that they are familiar power chords, containing only roots and fifths. Since the third of a chord is the note that makes it sound major or minor, power chords sound ambiguous. They are common in rock music and are aptly named since they can be cranked up and offer solid rhythmic support behind a singer. These three-note chords in guitar two provide a bass presence to the



Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



- Does not bend strings
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melody in guitar one, implying the chord progression C–Bm–G–D.

Notice that the Roman numerals reflect the changes in hand position needed to reach these chords. This example feels more like a guitar duet in which one person plays the melody and the other plays the chords. Passages like this may show up in standard notation this way, as opposed to using a chord symbol by name at the top of a staff.

3 TEAMWORK

In **Example 3**, the melody line is broken in half and spread distinctly between the two

parts. The second guitar starts this time and then the first takes the handoff to finish the line. Take note of the rests in this example to make it work cleanly. Measure 2 is a variation on the original melody played in harmony, but in slightly different rhythms.

Example 4 features embellishments in the first guitar part, adding ornamental notes to the original melody used in the previous lesson. The second guitar anchors the theme with steady quarter notes, again supporting the more active part by providing a time reference.

Example 5 puts these ideas together in a complete piece called “Duettes Two.” Measure 1

has a handoff of the melody to get us started, and counterpoint abounds, with different rhythms played in each part throughout the piece. In the second guitar, grab the G power chord in measure 5 at the third fret, then shift back to second position to finish the line up through measure 11.

Measure 13 applies a familiar-sounding root-five bass line, implying Em, Am, and Bm chords. The first guitar part has accidentals to watch out for in measure 12, all reachable in the second position.

In the next lesson, we’ll switch keys and change positions, so book another reading session with your duo partner. **AG**

Example 5: “Duettes Two”

The musical score for "Duettes Two" is presented in four systems, each with two staves. The first staff of each system is for the first guitar (treble clef), and the second staff is for the second guitar (treble clef). The key signature is G major (one sharp, F#). The time signature is 4/4. Measure numbers 1, 5, 9, and 13 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. Roman numerals III and II are placed above the second staff in measures 5 and 13 respectively, indicating fret positions. The score shows a duet between the two guitars, with the first guitar playing the melody and the second guitar providing harmonic support.

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BILL EVANS

Blues Clues

Learn to solo on the 12-bar minor pentatonic scale

BY DAVID HAMBURGER

Blues soloing can sound deceptively simple. There's really only one scale you need to use to get started, the minor pentatonic, and the beautiful thing about that scale is that it sounds good over all the basic chords of a standard blues or blues rock progression. However, just playing up and down the scale as the chords go by isn't really enough. Because the materials are so simple, most of the sound of blues soloing depends on how you use the few notes at your disposal.

In this lesson we're going to focus on some of the essential elements of blues soloing, including building simple phrases around the root of the scale, using call-and-response phrasing, sliding into notes, targeting the roots of the IV and V chords, and distinguishing between phrases that start on the downbeat and those that begin with a pickup into the downbeat.

We'll begin with the fabled minor pentatonic scale. **Example 1** shows the standard fingering at the fifth fret. Because there are no open strings, this is a moveable scale form—the lowest note is the root of the scale, A, so wherever you move this scale on the fretboard, it becomes the minor pentatonic scale of that key. For example, move this fingering to the third fret and it becomes a G minor pentatonic; to the eighth fret and you'll have C

minor pentatonic, and so on. We'll spend this lesson working in A, but you can transpose these ideas to any key just by moving the scale to another position on the fretboard.

Although Ex. 1 shows just over two octaves of the scale, there are only five notes in this scale; hence the name pentatonic, a Greek word meaning five (penta) and note (tonic). The five notes are the root, $\flat 3$, 4, 5, and $\flat 7$. Starting on the seventh-fret A, we can go up two notes to get the $\flat 3$ and the 4 of the scale, as in **Example 2a**, and down two notes to get the $\flat 7$ and the 5 of the scale (**Example 2b**). Now we've got the essential sound of the scale covered in one small area of the fretboard.

While it's deeply cool that we can cover all the notes we need with so little effort, the more important thing is that we can play a handful of basic blues licks with this little collection of notes, starting and ending on the root, A. Check out **Examples 3a–d**, paying careful attention to the rhythmic timing of the notes. All four examples have the same phrasing, starting right on the downbeat. Any one of these phrases will fit over any of the three chords of the basic 12-bar blues chord progression in A, shown in **Example 4**. **Example 5** repeats a single phrase over every other bar for a total of six times over the course of the 12-bar form.

Now it's time to start reaching a bit beyond the zone we've been working in. The lick shown in **Example 6** begins at the fifth fret on the B string. One of the fundamental concepts of blues soloing is the call and response—a good example being the way a guitarist answers a vocal line with an instrumental lick. You can create call-and-response moments within your own soloing, too. In **Example 7a**, the now-familiar lick in measure 1 is answered by the descending lick in measure 3. **Example 7b** has the same kind of phrasing, with different licks plugged in.

With a limited palette of notes to choose from, the way you play the notes becomes as important as when you play them. Electric guitar players rely heavily on bending strings to create a certain kind of fluidity, but on the acoustic guitar it's often more effective to use slides from one fret to another instead. As you work on **Example 8**, try to hear the grace note at the fourth fret as an incidental sound, while hitting the fifth fret squarely on the downbeat.

Working this kind of slide into the lick we had in Ex. 6 gives us the move shown in **Example 9**. Whole-step slides work well, too. Try the two licks that make up **Examples 10a–b**. Notice that the slides take you out of position—you slide up to where your first finger is no longer hovering safely around the fifth fret. It may take a little practice to be able to jump back down to the original scale position after making one of these slides.

The first call-and-response examples we played relied on leaving space—the musical equivalent of pausing for a breath—between the call and the response. In **Example 11**, it's the contrast between registers—a lick on the high strings versus a lick lower down—that gives the phrase a sense of call and response. The space comes afterward, in the remaining two bars, offering the opportunity for a response to you by another instrumentalist playing fills. The held note at the end of measure 1 gives you a little time to get back down to the fifth position after you've made the slide up.

Up until now each phrase we've played has started right on the first beat of the measure. But one of the most characteristic examples of blues phrasing is to start a lick before the downbeat of the measure. All four of the licks in **Examples 12a–d** start on the “and” of beat 3 of the previous measure and end on beat 1 of the main measure. The three notes before the downbeat are sometimes called a pickup, and this kind of phrasing is known as playing a pickup into the downbeat.

Example 13 shows how you could do call and response by playing a pickup into the



Example 1: A Minor Pentatonic Scale

Example 2a

Example 2b

5 fr.

1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 1 b3 4 1 b7 5

5 8 5 7 5 7 5 8 5 8 7 5 7 7 5 7

Examples 3a-d

7 7 7 5 7 7 7 5 7 7 5 7 5 7 7 5 7 5 7

Example 4

A7 x01030 D7 xx0213

7 A7 x01030 E7 023140 D7 xx0213 A7 x01030

Example 5

A7 D7

7 A7 E7 D7 A7

7 5 7 5 7 7 5 7 5 7 7 5 7 5 7 7 5 7

downbeat, waiting for most of a measure, and then, with another pickup into the second measure, playing a lengthier line for the response. Note the slide into the first note, from the fifth to the seventh fret on the low E string.

Playing pickups into the downbeat opens up another possibility—hitting the root of the next chord in the progression. For instance, the first

lick in **Example 14a** lands on an A note, which would work well on the I, IV, or V chord but works especially well going into the I chord in the key of A. In **Example 14b**, the last note has been changed to a D—the root of the IV chord, D7. And in **Example 14c** we land on an E note, the root of the V chord, E7.

The best way to see how this really works is to play through a full 12-bar blues, targeting

the root of each chord as it comes along. **Example 15** is a 12-bar solo that makes use of all the things we've been talking about—minor pentatonic licks, call and response, slides, and targeting the roots. Watch out for the ending lick in measures 11 and 12—it starts on the “and” of beat 1, throws in a ♭5 blue note (E♭) as the second note of measure 12, and ends with a groovy E7#9 chord. **AG**

Example 6**Example 7a**
Example 7b**Example 8**
Example 9**Example 10a****Example 10b****Example 11**
Example 12a**Example 12b****Example 12c**



Example 12d

Example 13

Example 14a

Example 14b

Example 14c

Example 15



Charlie Rauh



COLE LAND

Sonic Poetry

How great literature—and simplicity—can inspire depth in your music

BY CHARLIE RAUH

Connie Crothers, a great mentor and a brilliant pianist, once shared with me a profound insight: “The difference between something being complex and something being complicated is that complexity can be reduced to a foundation of simplicity. Something complicated cannot.” This notion frequently occupies my thoughts when I’m composing for solo guitar, underscoring how easily a simple idea can be dismissed, whether from a technical, conceptual, or intellectual standpoint.

As musicians, it’s often second nature to define ourselves by our technical prowess. While this pursuit isn’t inherently negative, it can sometimes divert our attention away from the essential foundation upon which our most personal creative expressions must rest. I’ve discovered that literature consistently serves as

a wellspring of inspiration, offering a pathway to unlock my musical thoughts. Literature, as a medium, demands that we conjure our own imagery and narrate subjects in our unique voices, and it effortlessly guides us toward our individual artistic revelations.

GROUNDING YOUR HARMONY

My latest album, *A Hymn to the Morning* (Destiny Records), comprises a collection of nine lullabies for solo acoustic guitar. This project draws its inspiration from the remarkable poet Phillis Wheatley Peters, who made history as the first African American to be published over 250 years ago. Wheatley Peters, who was initially brought to Boston as a slave, mastered the English language within a mere two years. She embarked on a

remarkable journey, becoming an internationally acclaimed literary genius and, notably, achieving emancipation following her literary success.

Wheatley Peters’ writings are characterized by their vividness, complexity, and beauty, brimming with rich imagery and an inherent, deeply personal empathy for the world around her. The title track of my album directly derives its name from one of my cherished poems by Wheatley Peters, where these remarkable qualities are on full display.

In my musical interpretation of the delicate yet passionate reflections on the first light of day found in the poem, I chose to employ expansive harmonic voicings that create a sense of weightlessness for the melody, all while interplaying with dissonant



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lines beneath. As showcased in **Example 1**, I employ the ringing open G string early in the passage, harnessing its natural sustain to introduce harmonic tension as the melody unfolds, eventually giving way to more closed voicings that lead to resolution. This approach offers a means to establish a broad, sturdy harmonic foundation without the need for full chords to bolster the melody. In doing so, I consciously steer clear of the usual techniques like low drone notes, repetitive rhythmic finger patterns, and ornamental melodic embellishments.

With this method, my primary focus lies entirely on the melody's movement, complemented by supporting voices, akin to the nuances of a vocal arrangement. The strategic use of silence between phrases and the gradual decay of notes further invites the listeners to immerse themselves in the very scene that inspired this composition—a scene of pure, unadulterated beauty witnessed in the early hours of the day.

PLAYING TO YOUR THOUGHTS

One aspect of composition that consistently fuels my inspiration is the act of playing an

idea on the guitar while exclusively focusing on the part it complements. This practice serves as a way of unlocking the genuine potential of simplicity in my compositions, all the while challenging myself to maintain a deliberate connection with my thoughts. I harnessed this process in crafting one of the more minimalistic pieces on the album, "Without Measure, Without End."

This composition drew its inspiration from an elegy penned by Wheatley Peters, dedicated to a child who had tragically passed away in her community. As I contemplated how to convey the depth of empathy and personal significance embedded in Wheatley Peters' words, I realized that I needed to play a melody that would serve as a counterpoint to these thoughts. Although this element might go unnoticed by the casual listener, it arguably constitutes the most crucial ingredient, providing the melody with unwavering purpose.

In **Example 2**, you can hear the linear, single-note melody played twice. Performing exposed and unadorned melodies as a soloist can be a daunting task, which underscores the importance of maintaining a solid foundation.

When your notes have a clear origin and a well-defined purpose, you deliver music that feels whole, substantial, and fully realized.

"HER MORNING SUN"

In **Example 3**, we delve into a complete solo piece from the album, drawing inspiration from yet another poignant elegy by Wheatley Peters. This particular poem, dedicated to a five-year-old child who has passed away, intimately addresses and consoles the grieving parents. Confronting the profound emotions within this piece of writing, I embarked on a journey to compose a lullaby that would encapsulate a sense of optimism amidst the backdrop of sorrow.

In pursuit of this delicate balance, I intentionally harmonized the melody with chordal structures that eschew sustained resonance. My aim was not to create a composition that relied on the guitar's sheer power, but rather to harness the instrument's capacity to evoke rich tones and hues. The concept was to craft a lullaby that tenderly embraces the pain articulated in the poem while leaning on the poet's response as to why it will ultimately not prevail. **AG**

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Example 1

Em Eb7#9/Bb Cmaj7 #11 Am Dsus4 D B/D# Am6 C

Tablature for Example 1 (Measures 1-5):

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
High E	8	7	0	7	5
B	0	0	0	5	3
D	0	6	3	4	5

Example 2

Tablature for Example 2 (Measures 1-4):

Measure	1	2	3	4
High E	8	7	8	7
B	9	7	9	7
D	6	9	6	9

Example 3: "Her Morning Sun"

Bb13 G13 C Ab11 Db Dm7b5

Tablature for Example 3 (Measures 1-5):

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
High E	8	5	0	3	1
B	7	3	0	3	1
D	6	3	0	3	1

Ab Eb Ab5 Cm Bbm7 Bbm6 1. Abmaj13 Bb13

Tablature for Example 3 (Measures 6-10):

Measure	6	7	8	9	10
High E	8	4	5	4	6
B	8	6	5	4	6
D	6	4	6	6	6

2. Abmaj13 Bb6 G7/B F C F/A

Tablature for Example 3 (Measures 11-15):

Measure	11	12	13	14	15
High E	1	3	1	3	5
B	0	3	0	3	5
D	4	1	2	3	5



COURTESY OF JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Instant DADGAD

Create alternate-tuning-like sounds with a three-string partial capo

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

A partial capo performs a kind of magic trick on your guitar. Fool your friends and baffle your enemies: you sound like you're using an alternate tuning, but you're not!

Partial capos accomplish this sleight of hand by holding down some strings and leaving others untouched—thereby changing the intervals between open strings.

In an earlier lesson (published in the May 2017 issue and in the book/video *Beyond Strumming*), I introduced the five-string partial capo, which gives you a setup similar to dropped-D tuning if you place the capo at the second fret covering the top five strings. Now let's explore the three-string capo,

designed to hold down strings 3–5 or, flipped around to the other side of the fingerboard, strings 2–4.

The most common use of a three-string capo is on strings 3–5 at the second fret—the capo is grabbing an Esus4 chord shape for you. (Look ma, no fretting!) In that position, the intervals between open strings are the same as in DADGAD tuning up a whole step (E B E A B E). So the capo gives you something like instant DADGAD, while your strings are physically still in standard tuning.

In this workout, we'll focus mostly on this DADGAD (or Esus) partial capo position—looking at chord shapes and then trying them

out in short progressions. In Week Four, we will flip the capo around to cover strings 2–4 at the second fret—so it's holding down an A major chord shape.

Unless you want to attempt cutting up a regular capo—not an easy or recommended hack—you'll need a special capo to play these examples. Fortunately, three-string capos are readily available and not a big investment: check out the Shubb C7B, Kyser Quick-Change Short Cut, D'Addario Artist DADGAD, G7th Newport three-string model, and others. And the cost is well worth it for cracking open a whole new candy box of sounds on your guitar.



WEEK ONE

First, put your partial capo in place on strings 3–5 at the second fret. Strum across the open strings to hear the sus4 chord. You may need to tweak your tuning after adding the capo; I find that a partial capo tends to knock out the tuning a bit.

Now check out the D chord shapes in **Example 1**, starting with the one-finger D5. Note that I'm naming chord shapes in relation to the capo; a D shape sounds as an E. Also note that the top line of these chord grids represents the capo position (second fret). When strings 6, 2, or 1 are open, they actually ring two frets below the capo, at the nut.

Try out the D major, D minor, and D7 shapes, all with lots of open strings. The Dadd4 is a sweet cluster voicing with the third and fourth of the chord next to each other.

Play some G voicings in **Example 2**. You'll notice that the first G shape looks and sounds just like you're in standard tuning—because you are in standard tuning! In the

Beginners' Tip #1

Remember that the partial capo only affects the sound when you're playing an un-capoed string open.

second G shape, leave the first string open. Then open up the second string, too, for a Gadd9. As shown, you can also play a Gadd9 by using the third-fret barre chord shape but leaving the top strings open; the example shows variations fretted with four, three, and two fingers. Finally, check out the Gm shape that's far gentler on the fingers than the usual six-string barre.

Example 3 offers a selection of A major and minor shapes enriched with sus4, add4, and 11 extensions on the open first and second strings. In the last few A shapes, move up the neck while still using open strings on top.

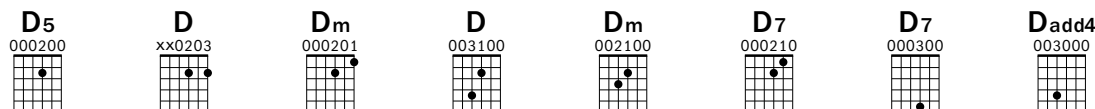
In **Example 4**, play through more chord shapes, starting with Cadd9 and C9. The E chords present a wrinkle: if you want a low root, you have to fret the sixth string alongside the capo. To accomplish that, you may need to scoot your capo a little further from the second fret (toward the nut) than you would normally place it; look for a sweet spot just far enough from the fret that your index finger can slip in to fret the sixth string, but not so far that it causes the capoed strings to buzz or sound dull. Fretting beside the capo like this may feel awkward at first but gets more comfortable with practice.

Closing out this week, play the Bm7, F6, and Bbmaj7 shapes, all with sparkly open strings on top. Bear in mind that you can transpose all these chord shapes (and the examples that follow) with a regular capo: just use a regular capo *plus* a partial capo two frets higher. If you put a regular capo at, say, the third fret, and the partial capo at the fifth fret, your D shapes sound in the key of G.

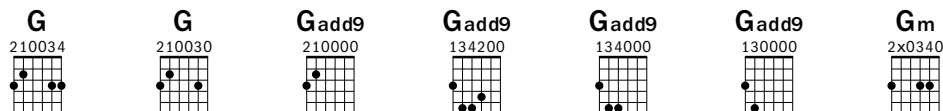
WEEK 1

Partial capo II, strings 3–5

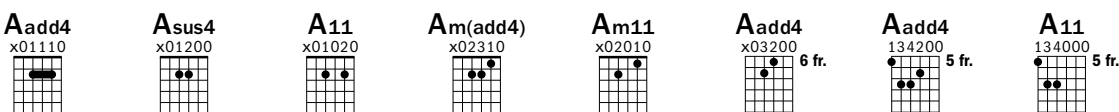
Example 1



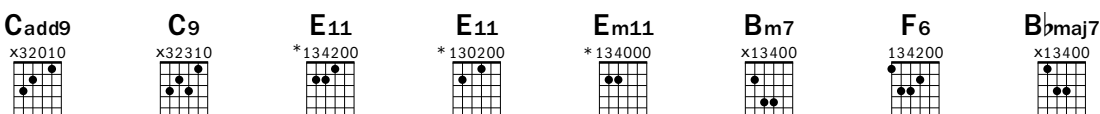
Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



* fret string 6 alongside capo

WEEK TWO

Now let's dig into some short progressions and riffs with the partial capo. First off, play **Example 5**, a simple I–IV–V–I in the key of D. Sounds familiar, right? You're fretting all the notes on strings 6, 2, and 1, so you get a straight-up standard-tuning sound.

Things start to get interesting when you do incorporate more open strings, as in **Example 6**, based on the same progression. Start with the one-finger Dadd4 and play Gadd9, Aadd4, and D5—voicings that add harmonic color.

As with DADGAD and other alternate tunings, this partial capo setup lends itself to playing melodic riffs over open-string drones. A case in point is **Example 7**, which was my first eureka discovery with the three-string partial capo. This jangly bit of chord melody is an adaptation of George Harrison's electric guitar riff in the Beatles' "Nowhere Man," and it inspired me to arrange the whole song, guitar solo and all, with the partial capo, as featured in AG way back in the October 2007 issue.

The similarity between this three-string capo position and DADGAD means that in many cases you can translate easily between them. I have done that with a number of guitar arrangements. For instance, my DADGAD take on Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here" (see AG July/August 2021 and the book *DADGAD Guitar Essentials*) originated on a three-string capo.

In my Homespun video series on Grateful Dead songs for acoustic guitar, I taught "Cassidy" and "Bird Song" in DADGAD but also perform those arrangements with the three-string capo.

WEEK 2

Partial capo II, strings 3–5

Example 5

Example 6

Example 7

Example 8

Check out a little snippet inspired by “Bird Song” in **Example 8**. Play the signature riff on the fourth and fifth strings and use open strings below and above to maintain a D drone. As you play the example, be aware of the meter change from 4/4 to 2/4 in the fourth bar.

WEEK THREE

This week it's time to tackle some examples that require fretting strings alongside the capo.

With an additional nod to George Harrison, the progression from “My Sweet Lord” works nicely with the three-string capo. In **Example 9**, start off with an Em11 in which you’re fretting the sixth string next to the capo. Switch to an Aadd4, which uses the familiar A shape but includes the fourth because of the un-capoed top string. With the Aadd4, as well as the Bm7 and F#dim7 in subsequent measures, change chords before the downbeat—on the last “and” of the previous measure.

Beginners' Tip #2

A partial capo can be confusing for sure. Don't worry too much about naming chords and notes; just explore and focus on the sound.

The D5 and Bm7 take advantage of partial-capo-enabled open strings, but the F#dim7 and B7 are just as they would be in standard tuning.

My own song “What I Never Said,” built around a drone-heavy guitar part with a three-string capo, also uses an Em with the bass note fretted next to the capo. (On the album track, my guitar is tuned down a whole step to D, but in the video accompanying this lesson I’m at standard pitch.) In **Example 10**, start with a Gadd9 at the third fret, move the same shape

down a fret for an F#m^b6^b9 and then down again for an Em¹¹, before landing on a D5.

You also may want to play notes on the top string(s) beside the capo. **Example 11**, based on Stephen Foster's "Hard Times," places the melody on the first string. Start on the open first string, and where you see "0 (2)" in the tab, fret alongside the capo. Because the capo is on the bass side of the neck, you have easy access to fretting this note. Play this example fingerstyle, and let the open strings ring as long as possible for a chiming alternate-tuning-style sound.

WEEK FOUR

Now flip your capo around to the other side of the neck, so it covers strings 2–4 at the second fret. Strum across the strings, and you’ve got an A major chord. The open string pitches are now E A E A C# E, which is the same as in open G tuning (D G D G B D) up a whole step.

WEEK 3

Example 9

Em11 Aadd4 *play four times* D5 Bm7

*Play actual fret 2

[illegible]

Example 10

***Doubled higher G eliminated in standard notation, for ease of reading**

This capo position offers a new set of possibilities. First check out a few chord shapes in **Example 12**. Again, I'm naming chords in relation to the capo position, so a G sounds as an A. The first G shape is all open strings—no fretting. You can, however, fret the top and/or bottom strings if you like, as in the next two shapes.

The G7 shape is similar to what you could use in the DADGAD partial capo position, except now you've got a root available on the open fifth string. The Em shape is the same as the one used in Week Three for Em11; with this capo position, the resulting chord is an Em7.

Next, try the Cadd9/G and slide up two frets for Dadd4/G. The latter chord could also function as a Gmaj7. Finally, play a D/F# with the same fingering you might use in standard

tuning with no capo, except mute the fifth string (lean your ring finger against it) and leave the first string open.

One song that uses this partial capo position is Dan Bern's classic "Jerusalem," which is the basis for **Example 13**. The sliding G riff in the first two measures may look familiar from standard tuning. The difference here is, because of the capo, you have chord tones available on the open fifth and first strings. You don't actually have to fret the sixth string because you've already got that note on the fifth string, but using both gives you a big, full bass note.

Starting in bar 3 of Ex. 13, play a descending G–D/F#–Em sequence. You can (as Bern often does) leave out the sixth string on the Em to simplify the fingering.

My song "Fly," which incorporates the fiddle tune "Sally Goodin," takes advantage of the partial capo for flatpicking a melody over my own rhythm. (My original studio recording does not use a partial capo, but the later release on the album *Live and Listening* is played this way, with an extended improv.) Try **Example 14**, based on the A section of "Sally

Goodin." Let the open fifth string bass note ring throughout. Play the melody on the third and fourth strings, and add some high drone notes on the upper strings—an effect akin to a banjo's fifth string.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

All of these examples are just a taste of what you can do with a three-string capo. You can of course find many more chord shapes and try other keys. You can also move the capo to other positions (see "Take It to the Next Level" for one idea). And if you really want to enter the twilight zone, use a partial capo in conjunction with an alternate tuning. Beware: it's a slippery slope—but a great ride. **AG**

Beginners' Tip #3

When you fret a string alongside the capo, your fingertip can be partially on top of the fret.

Beginners' Tip #4

With the capo holding down an A shape, try playing single notes up the neck on the high strings over open-string bass notes.

Example 11

WEEK 4

Partial capo II, strings 2–4

Example 12

G x00000	G x00004	G 300004	G7 x03040	Em7 * 134000	Cadd9/G x02010	Dadd4/G x02010	D/F# 1x0240

* fret string 6 alongside capo



Example 13

Chords: G, Cadd9/G Dadd4/G, Cadd9/G, G, D/F#, Em7, Cadd9, G, C/G, G

*Play actual fret 2

Example 14

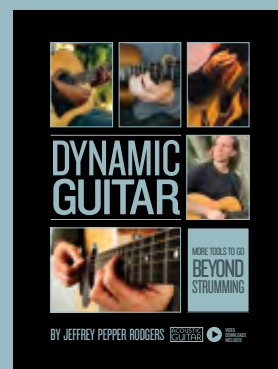
Chords: G, D, G

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Here's a sample of what you might find by moving the three-string capo up the neck. Place the capo on strings 3-5 at the fourth fret, where a C shape sounds as an E. Try this walk-down sequence reminiscent of "Mr. Bojangles," with a low root on the un-capoed sixth string and ringing open strings on top.

Partial capo IV, strings 3-5

Chords: C, Cadd9/B, Am7, G



This lesson is part of an upcoming collection by Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers. Learn more and pre-order *Dynamic Guitar: More Tools to Go Beyond Strumming* at store.AcousticGuitar.com.



Emily Saliers (left) and Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls



JEREMY COWART

Closer to Fine

How to play the Indigo Girls' folk-rock anthem

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Ever since the Indigo Girls released “Closer to Fine” on their Grammy-winning self-titled album in 1989, the song has been in wide circulation—embraced by legions of fans for its hooky chorus and timeless message of seeking and self-acceptance. But who could have imagined that one of the defining pop culture images of 2023 would be Barbie and Ken, aka Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling, singing along to “Closer to Fine” in a pink convertible?

“Closer to Fine” dates back to the beginnings of the Indigo Girls, when Emily Saliers and Amy Ray were just out of college and playing bar gigs. The song already had the hallmarks of their style, with tight harmonies, sturdy twin guitar strumming, thoughtful lyrics, and a bit of vocal counter melody. The

duo’s original track, with sparse instrumentation beyond their two acoustic guitars, pops up several times in the *Barbie* movie; for the expanded soundtrack album, Brandi Carlile contributed a slowed-down, dreamy interpretation sung with her wife, Catherine Carlile.

To play “Closer to Fine” in the Indigo Girls’ style, capo at the second fret and use G shapes, which sound in the key of A major. Both Saliers and Ray play out of this position, using slightly different voicings. The guitar notation here draws on elements of both of their parts.

In the intro, hold down the top two strings at the third fret while you change from G to A7sus4, Cadd9, and Dsus4, then follow with a classic Dsus chord embellishment. The A7sus4

shown is the shape that Ray uses; Saliers plays an Am7 at the same time, so the underlying harmony is minor. Maintain a similar driving rhythm pattern throughout the song, with plenty of down/up eighth note strums.

In the third and fourth lines of the verse, Saliers uses the Dadd4add9/A and C/G shapes, fretting the sixth string under both chords, while Ray plays standard D and C shapes.

The one place where the strumming rhythm pauses is in the short instrumental bridge, where Saliers picks a little melody on D and C chords as shown in the example.

Thanks to the *Barbie* spotlight, this classic song is finding its way into the ears and sing-along repertoires of an entirely new generation.

AC

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Chords, Capo II

Intro

G 210034
A7sus4 x01034
Cadd9 x21034
Dsus4 xx0134
D xx0132
Dsus2 xx0130
Dadd⁴₉/A 342010
C/G 342010
Gsus4 3x0014

G **A7sus4** **Cadd9** **Dsus4** **D** **Dsus2** **D**

Bridge

D **C**

Intro

G A7sus4 Cadd9 Dsus4 D Dsus2 D *play 2x*

- G A7sus4 Cadd9 Dsus4 D Dsus2 D**
 1. I'm trying to tell you something 'bout my life
- G A7sus4 Cadd9 Dsus4 D Dsus2 D**
 Maybe give me insight between black and white
- Dadd4add9/A C/G**
 And the best thing you ever done for me
- Dadd4add9/A C/G**
 Is to help me take my life less seriously
- G A7sus4 Cadd9 Dsus4 D Dsus2 D**
 It's only life after all, yeah
- G A7sus4 Cadd9 Dsus4 D Dsus2 D**
 2. Well, darkness has a hunger that's insatiable
- G A7sus4 Cadd9 Dsus4 D Dsus2 D**
 And lightness has a call that's hard to hear
- Dadd4add9/A C/G**
 And I wrap my fear around me like a blanket
- Dadd4add9/A C/G**
 I sailed my ship of safety till I sank it
- G Gsus4 G**
 I'm crawling on your shores

Chorus

D **Cadd9** **G**
And I went to the doctor, I went to the mountains

D **Cadd9** **G**
I looked to the children, I drank from the fountains

Dadd4add9/A **C/G**
There's more than one answer to these questions

G **Gsus4** **G**
Pointing me in a crooked line

Dadd4add9/A **C/G**
And the less I seek my source for some definitive
(The less I seek my source)

G **A7sus4** **Cadd9**
Closer I am to fine, yeah

D **G** **A7sus4** **Cadd9** **Dsus4** **D** **Dsus2** **D**
Closer I am to fine, yeah

3. **G** **A7sus4** **Cadd9** **Dsus4** **D** **Dsus2** **D**
And I went to see the doctor of philosophy

G **A7sus4** **Cadd9** **D**
With a poster of Rasputin and a beard down to his knee

Dadd4add9/A **C/G**
He never did marry or see a B-grade movie

Dadd4add9/A **C/G**
He graded my performance, he said he could see through me

G **D** **Cadd9**
I spent four years prostrate to the higher mind

D **G** **Gsus4** **G**
Got my paper and I was free

Chorus

Instrumental bridge

D C D C

G **A7sus4** **Cadd9** **Dsus4** **D** **Dsus2** **D**
4. I stopped by the bar at 3 A.M.

G **A7sus4** **Cadd9** **D**
To seek solace in a bottle or possibly a friend

Dadd4add9/A **C/G**
And I woke up with a headache like my head against a board

Dadd4add9/A **C/G**
Twice as cloudy as I'd been the night before

G **Gsus4** **G**
And I went in seeking clarity

Last chorus

D **Cadd9** **G**
I went to the doctor, I went to the mountains

D **Cadd9** **G**
I looked to the children, I drank from the fountains

D **Cadd9** **G**
We go to the doctor, we go to the mountains

D **Cadd9** **G**
We look to the children, we drink from the fountains

D **Cadd9** **G**
Yeah, we go to the Bible, we go through the workout

D **Cadd9** **G**
We read up on revival, we stand up for the lookout

Dadd4add9/A **C/G**
There's more than one answer to these questions

G **Gsus4** **G**
Pointing me in a crooked line

Dadd4add9/A **C/G**
And the less I seek my source for some definitive
(The less I seek my source)

G **A7sus4** **Cadd9**
Closer I am to fine

D **G** **A7sus4** **Cadd9**
Closer I am to fine

D **G** **A7sus4** **Cadd9** **Dsus4** **D** **Dsus2** **D** **G**
Closer I am to fine



Sidh Beag, Sidh Mor

Learn a traditional Celtic song arranged in standard tuning

BY AL PETTEWAY

So many guitarists play in open tunings that they sometimes forget about good old standard tuning—E A D G B E. Although DADGAD or another open tuning may seem to be right for a traditional or Celtic tune, it's always worth checking out the possibilities in standard tuning. I once decided to relearn all the Celtic tunes—like “Sidh Beag, Sidh Mor” and others I had been playing—in both standard and DADGAD. That way I wouldn't have to take precious time to tune during performances or travel with two instruments. I found that it was just as enjoyable to play the pieces in standard tuning as long as I found the right key positions.

“Sidh Beag, Sidh Mor” is an 18th-century harp tune, written by the blind Irish harper

Turlough O'Carolan. After trying the tune in the keys of G, C, and D major, I settled on C in standard tuning. In C position, most of the melody notes are reachable without leaving first position, and all the necessary bass notes are easily played.

Think of this transcription like a road map. It will get you where you want to go, but you must take your own scenic routes along the way if the trip is to be rewarding. Once you know the melody and chord structure, get away from the written page and work with the piece by ear. Not only will this give you more freedom to come up with original ideas, but it will also allow you to listen more carefully to the sound you are making and free you to play more musically.

AG



AL PETTEWAY

This arrangement by Al Petteway, who passed away in October, is excerpted from Acoustic Guitar Solo Fingerstyle Basics, available at store.acousticguitar.com. For more about Petteway, see the appreciation on the AG website.

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Capo II

The musical score is written for guitar and bass in 3/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece is titled "SIDH BEAG, SIDH MOR" and is a traditional arrangement by Al Petteway. The score is divided into six systems, each with a guitar staff and a bass staff. The guitar staff uses a treble clef and the bass staff uses a bass clef. The score includes various chords and fingerings, with some measures marked with a repeat sign. The chords are: C, F, C, F, G, C, G/B, Am, F, C, G/B, C, F, C, C^{sus4}, C, C, Am7, C/E, F, C, G, C, F, C, G/B, C, F, C, G, C^{sus4}, C.

The score is divided into six systems, each with a guitar staff and a bass staff. The guitar staff uses a treble clef and the bass staff uses a bass clef. The score includes various chords and fingerings, with some measures marked with a repeat sign. The chords are: C, F, C, F, G, C, G/B, Am, F, C, G/B, C, F, C, C^{sus4}, C, C, Am7, C/E, F, C, G, C, F, C, G/B, C, F, C, G, C^{sus4}, C.



LEAD BELLY: WILLIAM GOTTLEIB; KURT COBAIN: SUB POP RECORDS; TREES: DAN OTIS/UNSPLASH

In the Pines

Play the haunting traditional song popularized by musicians from Bill Monroe and Lead Belly to Nirvana

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

In the Pines” is an evocative traditional folk song with a rich and storied history spanning generations and musical genres. It’s also known by various titles, including “Where Did You Sleep Last Night?,” “Black Girl,” and “The Longest Train.” Thought to originate in southern Appalachia in the 1870s, this melody has captivated audiences for over a century. Its enduring appeal is showcased through renditions by artists such as Bill Monroe, the Louvin Brothers, Lead Belly, Doc Watson (on banjo), Dolly Parton, Loretta Lynn, Nirvana, and, more recently, Fantastic Negrito and Jake Blount.

One of the most famous interpretations of “In the Pines” comes from Lead Belly, the legendary blues and folk musician, whose 1944 recording for the Library of Congress helped to popularize the song and introduce it to a broader audience. Lead Belly’s raw and emotionally charged delivery set the stage for

many subsequent artists who tackled this enigmatic classic.

Fast forward a half century, and “In the Pines” experienced a resurgence when the iconic grunge rock band Nirvana included their rendition on the live 1994 *MTV Unplugged in New York* album. Kurt Cobain’s haunting and passionate performance added another layer of depth to the song’s history.

While bluegrass and traditional country renditions of the song, like those by Bill Monroe or Loretta Lynn, use a three-chord I–IV–V progression, Lead Belly included the ♭III chord, which adds a bluesy edge. Nirvana’s take follows this same progression.

The arrangement provided here, inspired by Nirvana’s version, serves as a study of acoustic rock guitar accompaniment. If you’d like to play along with the original Nirvana recording, tune your guitar down a half step. Based in the key of E major, the arrangement

features four main chords: I (E), IV (A), ♭III (G), and V (B), with an eight-bar progression that repeats throughout.

The notation includes an intro patterned after what Cobain played on the MTV performance, along with two suggested accompaniment patterns. The first is more riff-based, while the second emphasizes straightforward strumming. All three parts demonstrate how pared-down chord voicings can be effectively used in a rock context. Instead of strumming a full open E chord, try playing two- or three-note chunks, and either mute the G string with your first finger or stop that string with your fourth finger at 4 for an ambiguous-sounding E5.

When it comes to the lyrics, you’ll find various versions floating around. Do a Google search to identify commonly used sets and choose the ones that resonate with you the most.

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Chords

E₅



A



G



B



Intro

E₅ sus4 **A** **G**

B **E** **1.** **2.**

Accompaniment Pattern 1

E₅ **A** **G**

B **E₅**

Accompaniment Pattern 2

The musical notation for Accompaniment Pattern 2 is as follows:

System 1:

- Measure 1: Chord E5. Bass line: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0.
- Measure 2: Chord A. Bass line: 2, 2, 2, 0, 0, 0.
- Measure 3: Chord G. Bass line: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0.

System 2:

- Measure 4: Chord B. Bass line: 4, 4, 4, 0, 0, 0.
- Measure 5: Chord E5. Bass line: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0.
- Measure 6: Chord E5. Bass line: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0.

Intro (play 2x)

E5 A G
B E5

1. **E5 A G**
The longest train I ever saw

B E5
Went down that Georgia line

A G
The engine passed at six o'clock

B E5
And the cab went by at nine

2. **E5 A G**
In the pines, in the pines, where the sun never shines

B E5
And I shivered when the cold winds blow

3. **E5 A G**
Little girl, little girl, don't lie to me

B E5
Tell me, where'd you stay last night?

A G
I stayed in the pines where the sun never shines

B E5
And I shivered when the cold winds blow

4. **E5 A G**
I asked my captain for the time of day

B E5
He said he threw his watch away

A G
It's a long steel rail and a short cross tie

B E5
I'm on my way back home

5. **E5 A G**
The train run about a mile from town

B E5
And it knocked my fair girl down

A G
Her hair was found in a driver's wheel

B E5
And her body has never been found



David Grisman and Tony Rice



ERIC FROMMER

Banks of the Ohio

Learn an elegant cross-picking solo by the great Tony Rice

BY ALAN BARNOSKY

For the past 30 years, *Tone Poems* has been an album treasured by vintage instrument enthusiasts and acoustic music fans alike. On each track, David Grisman and Tony Rice showcase a different vintage mandolin and guitar, swapping melody and rhythm roles to reveal each instrument's unique tonal qualities. This fully instrumental album used straightforward song selections and simple recording procedures to focus on the acoustic properties of the instruments and the skill of the players wielding them.

It was an usual album for Rice, as he seldom played guitars other than his 1935 Martin D-28 or his Santa Cruz Guitar Company signature model. "*Tone Poems* was really work," he said in the biography *Still Inside: The Tony Rice Story*. "I can't just switch instruments." However, anyone listening to his expert playing on the record would think that he had a long history with these guitars, as his playing is deliberate, natural, and masterful. It's one of my favorite albums of his guitar work.

The album was a departure for Rice in another way, too. By the early 1990s he was recognized as the flashiest and cleanest bluegrass flatpicker of all time, and his albums were intense and spectacular. *Tone Poems*, on the other hand, featured simple tunes played slowly with ease and finesse. Among many classics on the record is "Banks of the Ohio," which Rice plays on a 1937 Martin 0-18 that rings out crisp and clear. Rice's first solo perfectly fits the sonic qualities of this guitar, and it also is an exceptional example of how chord shapes and cross-picking can flesh out a tasteful melody-based lead.

The song passes through G, D (or D7), and C chords, which sound as A, E, and D due to a capo at the second fret. During his solo Rice employs three distinct shapes to match each of the chords. The first appears in bars 1–2, a G-major triad on the top three strings fingered in a way that allows the melody to be played along the third string with the first and fourth fingers, while a cross-picking passage rings out

on the second and first strings. As the song moves to D in bar 3 (not counting the pickup measure), it switches to a D triad where the melody is again mostly played along the third string with the first and fourth fingers. These two shapes appear each time the song returns to G and D, while the third shape is the more common open C chord in bars 11–12.

There are two important elements to playing this solo well. The first is being able to properly hold the chord shapes noted above, so carefully follow the fingerings shown in the notation. These shapes may feel unusual at first, especially if you are not used to using your fourth finger, but doing so will help capture the essence of Rice's unique voicings. The other is being able to highlight which notes are melody. Most of the melody takes place along the third string, but in some instances it does go above and below that string. Listen to many recordings of "Banks of the Ohio," along with the *Tone Poems* rendition, to help build intuition for the song's melody.

AC

TRADITIONAL, AS PLAYED BY TONY RICE

Capo II

The image displays a musical score for guitar, written in 4/4 time and featuring a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score is organized into four systems, each containing a treble staff (melody) and a bass staff (bass line). The first system is marked with chords G and D. The second system is marked with D7 and G. The third system is marked with C. The fourth system is marked with G, D7, G, C, and G. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, and chords, as well as fret numbers and fingerings. The final measure of the fourth system is marked 'To mandolin solo'.

Tonight You Belong to Me

A charming Roaring Twenties waltz

BY MAURICE TANI



Maurice Tani

“Tonight You Belong to Me” is a delightful 32-bar song that goes back to the Roaring Twenties. Written by Billy Rose and Lee David, it was a big hit for singer Gene Austin in 1926 as well as Roger Wolfe Kahn and others around the same time. The song began to pick up steam again in the early '50s when Frankie Laine recorded his sophisticated big band version, but the big hit came in 1956 with a version by the teen sister duo of Patience and Prudence, which hit No. 4 on the charts and sold over a million copies.

“Tonight You Belong to Me” has been recorded by many other artists since then, from Dottie West to Eddie Vedder and Chan Marshall (Cat Power). It has been heard in commercials, films, and television shows; Steve Martin and Bernadette Peters famously sang it in a charming scene in the 1979 comedy *The Jerk*.

As per our usual *modus operandi*, let's keep this arrangement simple and in a key (namely, D major) that allows for easy, primarily open chording. Though we're using more chords than usual—a total of nine, some of them jazzy—they're all pretty easy to form.

Note the use of the Gm7 chord (G B \flat D F), which is borrowed from the key of D minor, adding a sophisticated flavor.

I like to fingerpick the simple accompaniment pattern shown here, but it will work just as well with a pick. Whichever technique you choose, be sure to play the song with a gently loping feel, as indicated by the swing eighth notes symbol at the beginning of the notation. In other words, instead of playing two even notes per beat, play them long-short. If you are unsure how to do this, just follow along with the video. **AG**

TONIGHT YOU BELONG TO ME

WORDS AND MUSIC BY BILLY ROSE AND LEE DAVID

Accompaniment Pattern

Chord diagrams for the accompaniment pattern:

- D**: xx0132
- D7**: xx0213
- G**: 320004
- Gm7**: 2x333x

Chord diagrams for the vocal melody:

- D**: xx0132
- D7**: xx0213
- G**: 320004
- Gm7**: 2x333x



D xx0132 **A7sus4** x01040 **D** xx0132 **To Coda** **1. A7sus4** x01040 **2. D7** xx0213

5 night, you be - long to me. 2. Al-though Wait

4 4 2 0 2 2 2 0 0 0 2

G 320004 **Gm7** 2x333x

10 down by the stream. How sweet it will seem once

0 2 0 0 2 0 1 3 0 1

D xx0132 **B7** x21304 **E7** 020100 **A N.C.** x0111x **D.S. al Coda** (no repeat)

14 more just a dream in the moon - light. 3. My hon - ey, I

0 2 0 2 1 0 2 0 2 0 3 4 2 3 4

Coda

Gm/D xx0333 **D** xx0132 **A7** x02030 **D** xx0132

18 But to - night you be - long to me.

0 2 4 4 2 0 2 2 0 0 0 2 3 2 3 2 0



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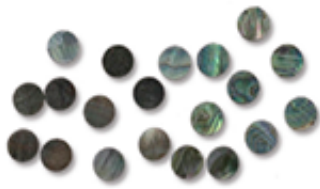
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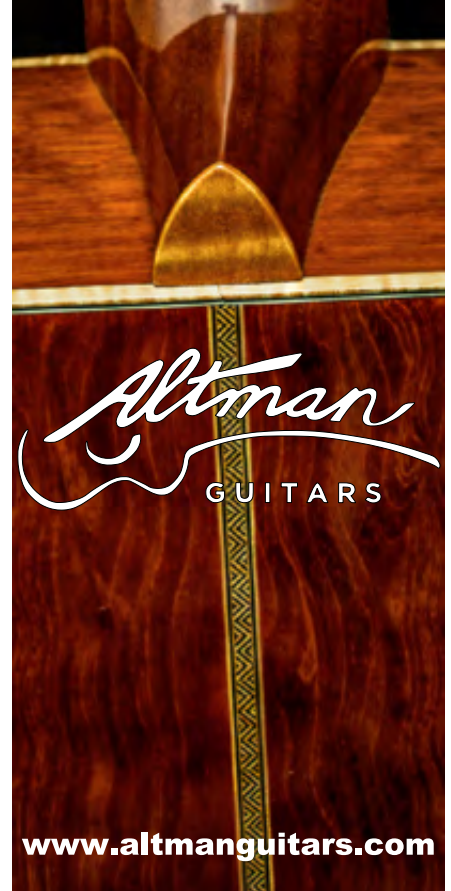
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Helene Webman and the ToneWoodAmp



COURTESY OF HELENE WEBMAN

Good Vibrations

ToneWoodAmp's Helene Webman on her company's unique gear and mission

BY MAC RANDALL

She isn't a guitarist; as she freely admits, sitting in front of a piano keyboard is more in her comfort zone. And yet Helene (pronounced "hel-AY-nee") Webman has become a significant player in the acoustic guitar universe. In 2014, she and her husband, Ofer Webman, co-founded a company called ToneWoodAmp, which produces one of the most intriguing pieces of guitar technology to emerge in the past decade.

Calling the ToneWoodAmp an effects device is, strictly speaking, accurate but also sells it way short. Yes, it takes the sound of your acoustic guitar and enhances it with reverb, delay, and modulation effects. But what makes it so innovative is the way it achieves this: by magnetically attaching to the back of the instrument and sending out the processed signal not as electrical impulses traveling through wires into an amplifier but as acoustic vibrations within the wood of the guitar's body. Those vibrations are then made audible the

old-fashioned way, via the soundhole. In short, the ToneWoodAmp turns an acoustic guitar into an amp, with the soundhole as its speaker. It's an invention that has the potential to cause acute disorientation—you may find yourself looking around vainly for a hidden combo somewhere—but odds are you'll adjust as soon as you realize that you can now conjure up a variety of cool tones usually considered "electric" without the assistance of an external amp.

The appeal of such a gadget is obvious, and a sizable number of prominent guitarists have adopted the ToneWoodAmp with evident pleasure. While Ofer (the guitar player in the house) has focused on spearheading the necessary tech development, Helene has put her marketing and people skills to work recruiting noteworthy artists and generally getting the word out. She's done a fine job; to have musicians in your corner on the order of Andy McKee, Mike Daves, Becky Langan, Larry Mitchell, Ben Lacy, Guy Buttery, Karla Davis, Cory Batten, Dayna

Manning, Steve Katz, Jerry Douglas, and George Benson is a major achievement. But as Webman explained in a Zoom interview from ToneWoodAmp's headquarters in Phoenix, Arizona, the biggest rewards from her perspective have come when she's been able to enlist her company in the service of higher causes.

Where did the idea of ToneWoodAmp come from?

My husband has a background in sound—he had his own studio when he lived in Israel—and he also loves to play guitar. One day he just said, "How can I jazz up the acoustic guitar? Why should all the electric guys have so much fun?" And he gathered some odds and ends and he made a prototype that *he* could hear. It was kind of hard to hear, but he got the concept. From there we just rolled on it. We did a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds, we got some engineers involved to make a proper prototype, and the rest is history.

How long did it take to develop something that you thought was marketable?

We did it quite quickly. I think it took about a year right from the original idea to getting it out on Kickstarter. We did go to a summer NAMM show to get some input and hear what musicians would actually say. Larry Mitchell was one of the first serious musicians that tried it out. The feedback was always like a little magic show—like, Where is that sound coming from? Because there was nothing out there like it. And what's beautiful about it is that it keeps the authentic sound of your particular guitar and just makes it sound sweeter, gives it a bit more life. People are finding it to be a creative tool, or if they just want to practice, it makes them want to practice more.

The crowdsourcing from Kickstarter really marks the ToneWoodAmp as a 21st-century product. In a previous era, raising funds for a device like this would have been far more complicated.

Without Kickstarter we would not have been able to get the ToneWoodAmp out. So many people supported us and didn't even really know what we were. It was hard to explain because it was such a new concept. We're very grateful to everybody who did that. And to be honest, the timing was brilliant for us. To do ads on Facebook at that time didn't cost anything. Today it's a new animal. For people to get their message out on Facebook or Instagram now, you've got to be creative and figure out how *else* you can tell your story. So there's always a wall that you've got to climb. But if you believe in it, you climb it.

How many people have you got working with you now?

We have quite a few freelancers, but our core team is ten people, and each one is really a gem. Everybody helps out in their beautiful way. So we're small but mighty. Covid slowed us down a little bit as far as trying to do what we're doing now, but we have lots of ideas and lots of energy. And from the beginning, since we were the new kids on the block, we built everything here in Phoenix, from the chip to the casing. We have our headquarters here, and everything is local.

Why Phoenix? Aren't you originally from Seattle?

Yes, but I spent so many years abroad. I went to Israel for one year of school and ended up living there for 24 years. I just loved it over there. I loved traveling and experiencing different countries. And I met Ofer there. But

to answer your question, my parents were snowbirds and would go down to Phoenix, so when we came back to America, it made sense that we would land here. You know, it's funny, my background is in English lit, and that has nothing to do with what I do today. But Ofer and I have always been creative, and it just evolved.

You've really never played guitar?

No. I did play piano as a young lady. I enjoy and appreciate music more than play it. And I love people. So that combination works for what I do.

How has your role within the company changed over time?

Well, in the beginning you have to wear a hat for everything, right? Now that we have a team, there are fewer hats on my head. But the

'The feedback was always like a little magic show—like, Where is that sound coming from?'

—HELENE WEBMAN

marketing aspect is what I particularly do. I'm always looking for creative ideas, always looking for more musicians or just folks out there that really love using the ToneWoodAmp.

And the list of such people is pretty impressive. What did you do to get, say, George Benson on board? He's in the Phoenix area, right?

He is, and we were able to drop in and visit with him. George is such a generous soul; he gave of his time just to be with us, and he loved it. I don't know how it happened, but we did it [*laughs*].

You just start asking, "Would you like to try this?" and once people tried it, they were in awe. Andy McKee—when we did the Kickstarter, he didn't know who we were. He didn't ask for anything; he just went ahead and bought three of them. And this is something that Andy does: He shares with the world things that he believes in. That really helped us on Kickstarter.

You've also reached out to Olena Gnes, a vlogger from Ukraine now living in the U.S.,

who recently started a children's channel on YouTube called Pani Kalyna, featuring songs in Ukrainian.

I was aware of her from watching her on CNN, and I really connected to the whole journey of what's going on in Ukraine on a personal level from a lady that has three kids. She came to the United States with them after her husband went to war. Her youngest child is quite small and was watching all these American kids' programs in English. Olena wanted to make sure that her daughter continued with the Ukrainian language, and she understood that many kids might need this, both in and out of Ukraine. She's very savvy. She's a journalist by trade, and she started this channel. And it's fabulous. She already has—I checked today—17,000 followers, and she started maybe five months ago. I wanted to help her and give her a little something from us. We have the ToneWoodAmp, of course, but I needed to get a guitar to go with that, so we asked our friends at Kremona if they'd be interested in sharing something with her, and they did kindly do so. And now Olena's using a Kremona acoustic guitar with a ToneWoodAmp on her channel.

In marketing circles, they call that a win-win.

And it represents something that we're always looking to do: How can we help people and bring some joy to them, whether it's through playing more or sharing their stories? We have another artist that I connected to, Sawyer Auger, and he helps a lot with mental health, doing house tours around the United States and speaking about that topic. Anything like that that we can help with, we're very open to. That's part of who we are.

And something, I presume, that you'll keep exploring in the future.

Always. It's something that I gravitate to and that we as a company gravitate to. I mean, anytime any of our musicians are doing some kind of Kickstarter, we're there to help. We provide units for them to add to their project. For example, Andy has a trio now with Calum Graham and Trevor Gordon Hall [Triplicity]. They just put something out and we helped with that. Even people that aren't pros, we're always there to help, especially if it's for a great cause.

Another part of who we are is disconnecting from all the wires and going outdoors with your guitar. That's a big thing that we love to share. Ofer and I, we go out camping a lot, and Ofer will take a guitar with the ToneWoodAmp, and it just echoes in the forest. It's absolutely beautiful. So it's to bring joy to nature, to yourself, and just get creative.

AC

Schmutz Be Gone

How to clean a guitar fretboard the proper—and safe—way

BY MARTIN KEITH

Q: *I recently took my parlor guitar to a tech who set it up and “cleaned the fretboard,” but his work was not pleasing to the eye. The tech said he used solvent and lemon oil for the cleaning. What is the proper way to care for a fretboard?*

—Dana Howard

A: Fretboard cleaning is one of those Goldilocks aspects of instrument care. In my repair work, I’ve had to deal with issues arising from both extremes of fretboard maintenance: damage from overzealous and heavy-handed cleaning and oiling, and the grime-encrusted victims of long neglect.

Since your question mentions a solvent, let’s begin with this: no solvents should be necessary for proper fretboard maintenance, and there are risks involved with their use. In addition to the obvious risks to the finish, solvents can compromise the integrity of the fretwork itself. Many manufacturers and techs use glue when installing frets, and some solvents can wick underneath the frets and attack that glue. If the guitar has bindings and/or inlays, solvent could also loosen or attack them, especially if they are celluloid.

Nothing more extreme than guitar polish or lukewarm soapy water should ever really be necessary to clean a fretboard, and even those should be used sparingly. In general, unless you are a professional, avoid using any kind of solvent on your guitar. If you need to remove old tape or stickers, the safest solvent is naphtha, which is known to be relatively safe for most glues and finishes when used with caution.

When I encounter disturbing amounts of grime and dirt on a fretboard, I generally begin



BILL EVANS

by carefully scraping to remove as much as I can mechanically. This can leave scratch marks on a fretboard, so use a safe tool—one easy and very effective option is simply a popsicle stick with the end cut to a clean, square face. Using this stick like a chisel, you can remove quite a lot of gunk from a fretboard without much risk of scarring the underlying wood.

I follow with a silicone-free guitar cleaner such as Dunlop Formula No. 65 or Stew-Mac guitar polish. These are helpful in softening and loosening up remaining dirt so it can be scrubbed off. It can be hard getting into the tiny little corners next to the frets. For this, one of my best tools is just an old toothbrush. If necessary, you can trim the bristles a bit to make them shorter and stiffer for particularly tough areas.

In cases where the fretboard needs a lot of cleaning, the frets themselves are also frequently tarnished and in need of polishing. This is a common area where people inadvertently do minor damage—not just players but also many well-meaning guitar techs.

Historically, the best material for polishing frets has been 0000 steel wool, which is inexpensive, easy to find, and leaves a beautiful shining surface on the frets. The softness of the pad also conforms perfectly to the rounded fret tops and leaves no corners or flat spots. However, steel wool has a few big downsides. It sheds tiny particles of steel when used, which can float in the air and be inhaled. These particles will also quickly and tenaciously cling to any nearby magnet (such as a pickup); some pickups are susceptible to



Martin Keith

GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care or maintenance, the ins and outs of guitar building, or another topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar's* repair expert, Martin Keith, by sending an email titled “Repair Expert” to Editors.AG@stringletter.com and we’ll forward it to Keith.



If your question is selected for publication, you’ll receive a complimentary copy of *AG's Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual*.

interference and even damage from accumulated steel wool particles. Finally—and most important for this question—polishing frets with steel wool invariably leaves a pattern of fine cross-grain scratches in the fretboard wood. You might not see the scratches in all light conditions, but they are painfully obvious once you know what to look for.

If you are using steel wool to clean your frets, I very strongly recommend masking the fretboard. This can be done with tape, which is a time-consuming process that many techs still find worthwhile, or with the one-at-a-time fret masking tools sold by many of the luthier supply companies. If you don't want to invest in those, you can approximate them for occasional use by simply cutting a fret-sized slot in a piece of thin, resilient plastic. However, for many of the reasons above, I have gravitated away from steel wool in recent years, choosing instead to use a combination of green and gray nonwoven abrasive pads such as Scotch-Brite,

Nothing more extreme than guitar polish or lukewarm soapy water should ever really be necessary to clean a fretboard.

fine sandpaper on a concave backing tool, and (of all things!) the foam-backed abrasive blocks marketed for polishing fingernails. This last item is my current favorite—inexpensive and versatile. Many of these blocks have four different grits around their perimeter, which permits quick and very nice fret polishing. (Again, mask your fretboard!)

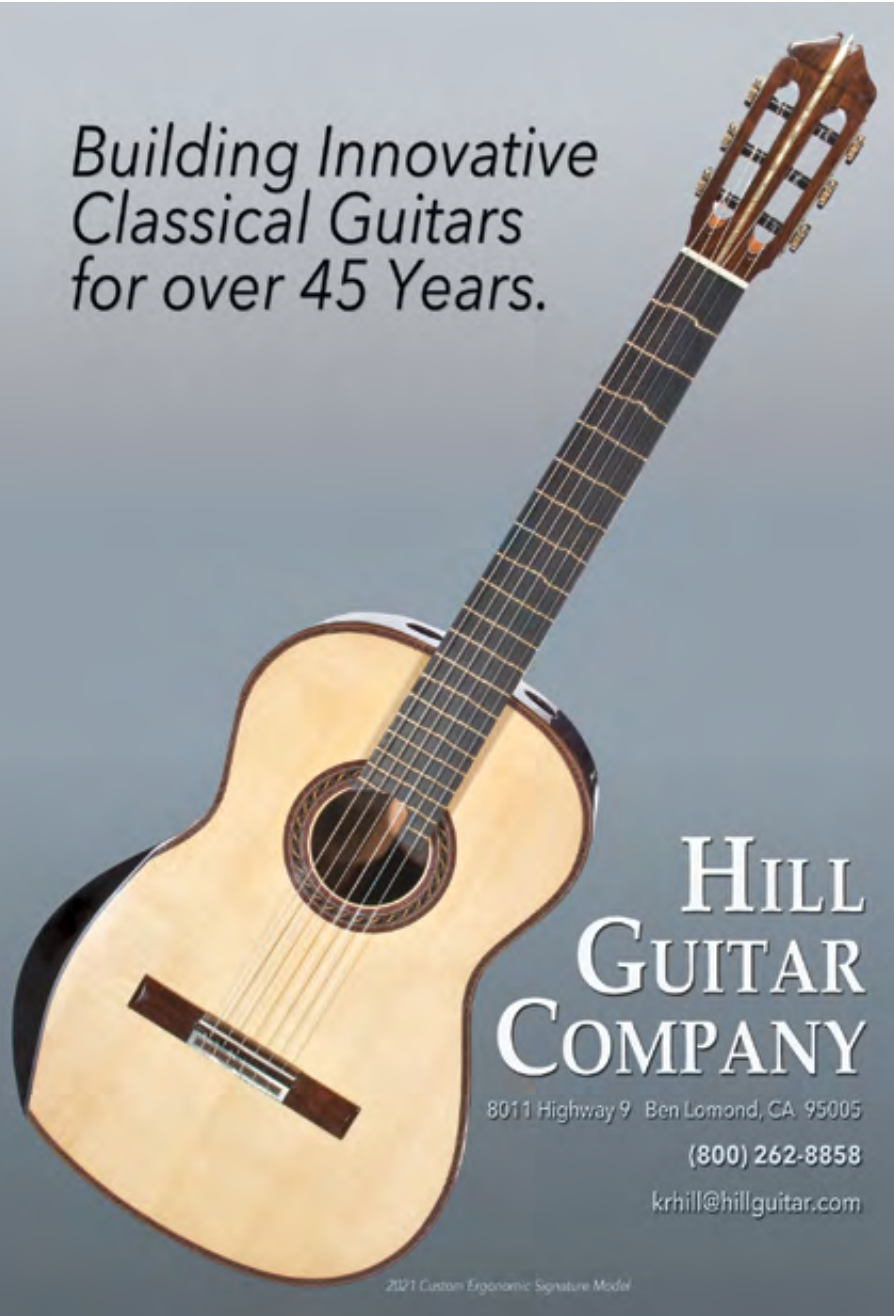
The final stage in a typical fretboard makeover is oiling, and even this seemingly harmless task can be overdone. Oiling a fretboard is fun; it makes the wood look dark, rich and shiny, and gives the whole guitar a vibe upgrade. It also feels smooth and slick under the fingers, whispering promises of fast runs and effortless action. For these understandable reasons, it's not uncommon for people to go overboard with oiling, by using too much and doing it too often. On brand-new instruments with kiln-dried fretboards, I put just enough oil on a soft cloth to leave a consistent color when wiped on the fretboard, but no more.

Well-loved instruments already have quite a bit of natural oil worked into the wood, so not much more is needed. Many times, I've seen people soak a rag with lemon oil and

lather on a thick-drippy layer of oil, most of which needs to be wiped off afterwards. In addition to being a waste, this does very little to help the fretboard resist seasonal humidity changes, and it can have other unwanted side effects. Over-oiling the fretboard can cause loose frets by wicking under the fretwire and into the slots, even if the frets are glued in place. As with solvents, oils can also creep under inlays and put those at risk of coming loose. Excess oil on the fretboard will end up on your strings, shortening their lifespan and dulling the sound prematurely.

And finally, it just makes a mess. Apply oil lightly and sparingly.

Cleaning and maintaining your fretboard can be fun and satisfying and is most easily done when changing strings, which many people do on their own. (This is one reason why I encourage people *not* to change their strings one at a time—that makes it nearly impossible to clean your fretboard during the string change!) I encourage you to give fretboard cleaning a try for yourself. Just keep the above recommendations in mind, to hopefully help keep the guitar off the repair bench a little longer! **AC**

An advertisement for Hill Guitar Company. It features a high-quality photograph of a light-colored wood classical guitar with a dark fretboard and bridge. The guitar is positioned diagonally across the frame. The background is a solid, muted blue-grey. Text is overlaid on the image in a clean, sans-serif font. The top text reads 'Building Innovative Classical Guitars for over 45 Years.' The bottom right contains the company name 'HILL GUITAR COMPANY' in large letters, followed by the address '8011 Highway 9 Ben Lomond, CA 95005', the phone number '(800) 262-8858', and the email 'krhill@hillguitar.com'. A small line of text at the bottom right of the guitar reads '2021 Custom Ergonomic Signature Model'.

Yamaha FG9 R

**Rosewood and Adirondack
spruce dreadnought
boasts boutique specs
and shimmering tone**

BY EMILE MENASCHÉ

Visually, the new Yamaha FG9 R exudes stunning simplicity. Sonically, it's remarkably complex. The guitar's unique combination of these two qualities make it one of Yamaha's finest steel-strings to date. However, even if this elegant offering looked like a concussed hippie's psychedelic fever dream, its almost effortless explosion of overtones would still mark it as a serious instrument.

The FG9 R's design adheres to the classic dreadnought shape and materials, showcasing luthier-level craftsmanship typically associated with boutique builders or custom shops rather than the world's largest manufacturer of musical instruments. This limited-edition beauty indeed feels like a bespoke guitar, and it truly shines whether flatpicked or fingerpicked.

THE BUILD AND EXECUTION

Handcrafted in Japan, the FG9 R is made with time-honored materials—solid Indian rosewood back and sides (mahogany on the sibling FG9 M) and solid Adirondack spruce top with scalloped X-bracing. The mahogany neck is topped with an ebony fingerboard. The nut and compensated saddle are bone, and the body is finished in delicately applied nitrocellulose lacquer, while the neck has a smooth semi-gloss polyurethane finish.

But under the hood, things aren't as retro. The top has tapered edges, which are said to provide strength and allow the body to vibrate more freely, translating to a powerful and dynamic sound. The neck joint uses a hybrid of bolt-on and glued construction, designed to increase the body's vibration while making it easier to do a future neck reset if needed. While it's impossible to know how either a pure bolt-on or glued neck would sound with the rest of the design, the guitar's tone suggests exceptional contact between the neck and the resonant chamber.

Yamaha has achieved a remarkable level of quality in this new design. The fit and finish of our test model are exceptional, with a smooth





feel throughout. The action is low but not excessively so, and the intonation is outstanding.

EAST-MEETS-WEST AESTHETICS

Before delving into the remarkable tone of the FG9 R, let's take a moment to appreciate the visual simplicity mentioned earlier. Yamaha aptly describes it as an "understated Japanese aesthetic." The fingerboard inlays pay homage to traditional Kumiko woodworking, and they are particularly distinctive. These inlays feature small rectangular dashes on the bass side of the fingerboard that elegantly wrap down to the edge. Set against the dark ebony, the inlays incorporate color elements from the body, with the light edges echoing the natural spruce and the reds beautifully complementing the warm tones of the mahogany and rosewood.

The top sports rope purfling, also seen in concentric rings on the soundhole rosette as well as the backstrip—another motif Yamaha has drawn from Japanese tradition. I was particularly impressed by the understated aesthetic of the headstock, with the simple Yamaha inscription in light wood against the dark finish. The addition of the black open-gear Gotoh tuners further enhances the overall sense of elegance.

EXUBERANTLY VOICED

If the FG9 R's appearance is about restraint, then its sound is about exuberance. It's not the six-month-old golden retriever kind of exuberance, but more like Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain*, where pure joy meets absolute mastery.

I use the term sound instead of tone because what strikes me when playing the guitar is how it fills the room. I was initially a bit taken aback not to see electronics on the guitar; Yamaha may or may not like being characterized as a practical choice, but most players I know seem to think of the company that way. And what could be more practical than a pickup on what's clearly a professional-quality guitar?

However, when I played it for the first time, I understood. There's almost no point in putting a pickup on a guitar like this; it wouldn't be able to capture the way the sound pours into the air. Electronics would simply detract from the wood's vibrations. If I had to pick one word to describe the sound, it would be vibrant. In terms of sympathetic resonances and overtones, the FG9 R I tested ranks among the best guitars I've played.

Even a simple single note on the high E string sent the top shimmering with sound. It's not quite orchestral, and it's not out of control; it's just very full and very present. Those overtones

are impressive enough on the attack and main sustain of a note, but what really caught my attention was the decay. I can only describe it as linear, where the overtones seemed to fade in parallel with the main body of the note.

The sustain and decay also have an interesting quality. Think of the way an acoustic guitar note sustains. It goes from peak to quieter to very quiet and then—it's gone. On the FG9, there seemed to be more levels of quieter where I could still hear remnants of the note, like it was still ringing to the end of my ability to hear it and beyond. In real life, that's probably not something you'd be able to use in performance or recording—most people would have faded the track out long before the point I'm describing. But just as a sheer expression of the instrument's resonant quality, it's impressive. Vibrant, indeed.

In terms of sympathetic resonances and overtones, the FG9 R I tested ranks among the best guitars I've played.

Of course, even I like to do more with a guitar than listen to a note decay and contemplate the universe. The dreadnought has been described as the workhorse, and Yamaha says its FG9 models are voiced to accompany singers. Perhaps. Chords sound big and bold, with impressive clarity between the individual notes. All that resonance on single notes I described above doesn't translate into confusion when you play chord harmonies; it's quite the opposite.

The FG9 has a very distinctive midrange voice. In fact, that's what made me think of the Gene Kelly analogy, one of those old-school singers who could announce and move smoothly across his range. The FG9 has a warm, chest voice in the lower and middle register, but it can deliver very punchy percussion to the attack when your playing demands it.

Played with a flatpick, the attack is clear and clean. The treble is strong but not bright: more Frank Sinatra than Robert Plant. Few things tell me more about a guitar than playing some open G chords and throwing in some

single-note lines, then holding one big chord. After everything I described about the FG9's sustain above, I was still taken aback when I switched from rhythm to lead to a final G on the high E string. The chord was still ringing as the overtones rose up to take over, like a natural crossfade.

In the context of fingerstyle playing, I found that the rich midrange of the FG9 was particularly effective. It seemed to me that using my fingers allowed for greater exploration of the FG9's wide range of timbres and provided enhanced control over balancing tones from the lower register to the higher notes.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Having a street price of \$4,099.99 for the FG9 R we tested (\$3,999.99 for the mahogany version), this is clearly an instrument designed for demanding players. With its focus on acoustic tone and lack of electronics, I would think of the FG9 R as a guitar for the studio or the concert hall, as opposed to the pop/country music stage.

As a reviewer, I have had the privilege of playing hundreds of great guitars, each with its unique qualities. However, over the years, it has been a rarity to come across an instrument that truly changed the way I listen to my own playing. The FG9 R accomplishes just that. **AC**

SPECS

BODY 14-fret dreadnought; solid Adirondack spruce spruce top; scalloped X-bracing; Indian rosewood back and sides; ebony bridge with bone saddle; tortoise pattern pickguard; gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish

NECK Mahogany with hybrid bolt-on/glued-in joint; 25-9/16" scale length; 1-3/4" bone nut; ebony fretboard with 15-3/4" radius; Gotoh SXN510 tuners; semi-gloss polyurethane finish

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COURTESY OF BOSS

Boss AC-22LX

A compact acoustic amplifier with a variety of compelling features

BY DOUG YOUNG

Are you tired of lugging around a heavy amplifier along with external pedals? Boss has a new acoustic amplifier that might just solve your problem. The AC-22LX (\$399 street) weighs just under nine pounds and somehow feels even lighter. The simulated wood cabinet, roughly 12.5 by 8.5 by 10.5 inches, houses a pair of five-inch speakers powered by five watts each. It offers an impressive array of features, including a looper, drum machine, reverb, and chorus, while producing a sound much bigger than one would expect from such a small, low-powered amplifier. To enhance portability further, the AC-22LX can be powered with eight AA batteries instead of its included AC power adapter.

The basic features of the AC-22LX include an instrument channel offering a 10M impedance 1/4-inch input, as well as a mic channel with an XLR input and optional phantom

power. The instrument channel offers volume plus a three-band EQ section, while the mic channel has volume, treble, and bass controls. Reverb can be applied to both channels, and chorus is available on the instrument channel. The amp also offers mono or stereo line outputs, a recording/headphone stereo output, and a USB connection or optional Bluetooth that supports audio in and out of a computer or mobile device as well as access to additional features.

BEYOND THE BASICS

While the core features of the AC-22LX are typical of small combo amps, the additional features are where things get interesting. An onboard Rhythm Box provides direct access to five different rhythm patterns with a tap tempo button. You can expand the available rhythms by pressing a button or by choosing

from a longer list available only from an external app. The built-in looper is operated via an external footswitch (sold separately) and offers the standard behavior of many single-button loopers: record, play, overdub, and double-tap to stop.

The most intriguing feature of the AC-22LX is the stereo simulation that Boss calls Air Feel. A six-position switch lets you choose between a dry, direct sound, and various options named after common stereo miking techniques, such as XY, AB, and ORTF. These settings leverage the twin speakers in the AC-22LX to produce a stereo effect. With such a small speaker cabinet, these settings don't produce an obvious stereo sound, but they do add different degrees of openness, ambience, and air to the sound.

While the amp controls offer a lot of flexibility, the app, available for iOS, Android, Mac, and Windows, opens up many more possibilities. You can choose from different reverb and chorus types and tweak many parameters to dial in your sound. There are additional percussion patterns available, and you can even create a set list containing a sequence of settings to be used on different songs.

SOUND CHECK

Given its small footprint and low wattage, the AC-22LX produces a surprisingly full sound with a warm, round tone that is very pleasant to play through. The sound emphasizes the midrange, as expected from such a small cabinet, but in a complementary way.

The AC-22LX produces only moderate volume—I was able to play with the amp about 75 percent of the way up, sitting on a table directly facing my guitar a few feet away, without feedback. However, it does fill a small room, especially with the Air settings engaged. The amp would be ideal at home, for playing an acoustic house concert, or for a small coffee shop gig. For larger venues, you could use the stereo line out to feed a house system while using the amp as a stage monitor.

The built-in looper and percussion effects are very useful during practice sessions, although some may find the available beats and the one-button looper operation limiting for live performance. I'd prefer to see XLR DI outputs, support for a dedicated stop/clear button for the looper, and the ability to program additional drum sequences. However, the existing features and capabilities of the amp are impressive as they are, combining good sound with a great deal of flexibility in a tiny, ultra-lightweight package. boss.info/us

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Joni Mitchell Archives, Vol. 3: *The Asylum Years (1972-1975)*, Rhino

Woman of Heart and Mind

The latest Joni Mitchell Archives release takes a deep dive into her creative breakthroughs of the early '70s

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

These are happy days for Joni Mitchell fans. First the pioneering songwriter and guitarist returned to the stage after recovering from a near-fatal brain aneurysm—making a stunning surprise appearance at Newport Folk Festival in 2022, followed in 2023 by a full-blown Joni Jam at the Gorge in Washington state, both spearheaded by Brandi Carlile. Meanwhile, the accolades and awards for Mitchell have been piling high, along with, it seems, rising appreciation of her contributions among musicians and listeners alike.

And now comes a remarkable new view into one of the most transformational periods in her music, through Rhino Records' release of *Joni Mitchell Archives, Vol. 3: The Asylum*

Years (1972-1975). This new volume spans a time when she made multiple breakthroughs—as a songwriter, guitarist, and bandleader—from *For the Roses* to *Court and Spark* and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*.

The set is surely not for the casual listener. The four-LP version includes 40 tracks, while the full digital/five-CD collection offers a whopping 96—almost six hours total of demos, early/alternate studio takes, and concert sets, including Mitchell solo at Carnegie Hall in 1972 and with Tom Scott and the L.A. Express in Los Angeles in 1974.

This deep-dive approach allows you to consider songs from multiple angles. If you love, say, “Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire,” in the

full digital/CD release you'll hear a gorgeous guitar and voice demo recorded during a 1971 visit to Graham Nash and David Crosby's recording session; a solo performance well before *For the Roses* came out; a working mix where she sings a guide track for saxophone; and a live duet with Tom Scott.

One of the major musical developments in this period was Mitchell really going off the grid with guitar tunings, with songs like “Baran grill” (D A C F# A D), “For the Roses” (G G D G B D), and “Woman of Heart and Mind” (B F# C# E B D#), and an attendant opening up to more complex harmonies. At the same time, she was leaving behind the strumming and conventional fingerpicking of songs like “Big Yellow Taxi” and “The Circle Game” to develop her own free-form type of fingerstyle. You can hear all this in detail on the many solo tracks from the studio and stage—a feast for Mitchell guitar fans. (This is admittedly a guitar-centric perspective: there are lots of piano/vocal tracks on the release as well.)

Especially with *Court and Spark*, when her guitar became part of a thicker instrumental mix, it's a revelation to hear solo demos of songs like “Help Me,” “Just Like This Train,” and “Trouble Child.” All the supple rhythms, rich harmonies, and moving lines of the fully orchestrated versions are present in her guitar.

When I interviewed Mitchell for this magazine in 1996, she described her early frustrations with trying to find a band that clicked with her music; as she memorably put it, “They were imposing style on something without seeing what the something was that they were playing to. I thought, ‘They're putting big, dark polka dots along the bottom of the music, and fence posts.’” On this release, you can hear exactly what she means, through a series of studio takes of, for instance, “You Turn Me On I'm a Radio”: in early sessions, the rhythm section of Neil Young and the Stray Gators completely misses her feel, in multiple attempts.

This mega release includes way more noteworthy tracks than I have space to detail, but a few that linger in my mind are a goof-around R&B medley with James Taylor; “Sunrise Raga,” a guitar/tabla instrumental that has the kind of open-tuning melodic strumming sound that Michael Hedges would mine decades later; and some stage raps, like a six-minute intro to “People's Parties,” that showcase Mitchell's wild intelligence and offbeat wit.

Packaged with a lavish 40-page book, this collection is substantial on every level. Most of all, it renews my appreciation for what a clear vision Mitchell had for her songwriting and guitar, and how determinedly she brought it to life. **AC**

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Signed, Elizabeth Lusterman, Publisher

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1949 Gibson SJ-200

A guitar once belonging to the Reverend Gary Davis finds a good new home

BY DAVID MCPHERSON

Sometime in the 1950s, the Reverend Gary Davis acquired several Gibson SJ-200s from Eddie Bell Guitar Headquarters on New York City's famed Musician's Row. This marked the beginning of his love affair with the jumbo-bodied "king of the flattops," which he affectionately called Miss Gibson.

In the mid-1960s, the legendary singer-songwriter and bluesman played one of his SJ-200s in a concert at Le Hibou Coffee House in Ottawa, Ontario. Following the gig, Davis and local poet Bill Hawkins apparently went on a two-week bender. When Davis finally sobered up, with no money to pay his pal back for their hefty bar tabs, he left his Gibson as collateral.

What happened to Davis's SJ-200 in the ensuing decades is as murky as a Louisiana swamp. But it's now owned by an artist who respects its history—Canadian singer-songwriter Tom Wilson, who had the good fortune of scoring the guitar several years ago from an Ottawa politician.

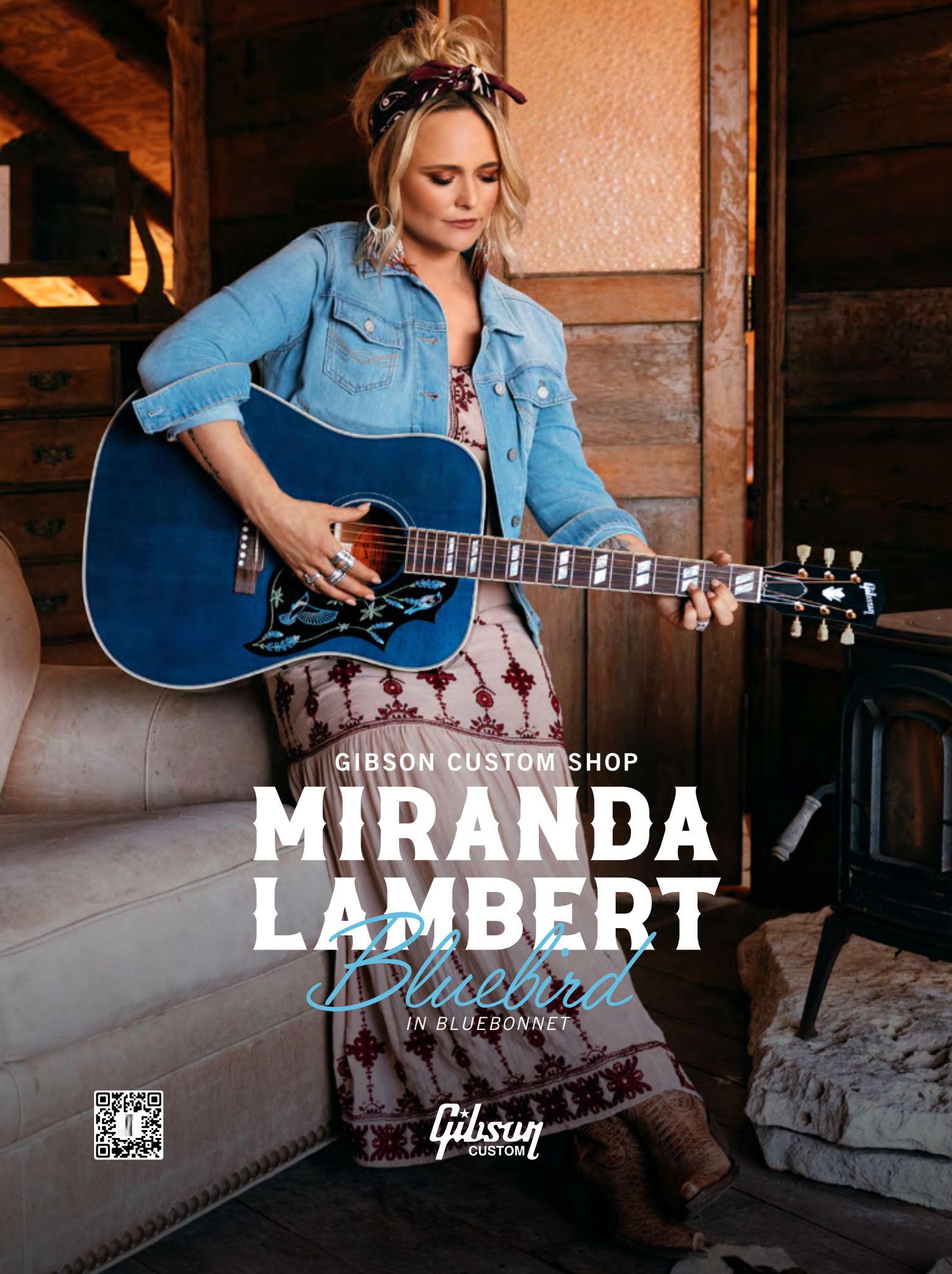
When Wilson received the SJ-200, it was not in playable condition, so he took it to local luthier Mike Spicer, at the Peghead in Hamilton, Ontario, for some repair work. Spicer reglued the guitar's loose braces and sealed several top and back cracks, while also performing a much-needed neck reset. He left alone some previous repairs that are a part of the guitar's rich history. Spicer's biggest challenge was making a new moustache-style bridge in Brazilian rosewood and mother-of-pearl as the original part was long gone.

Once restored, Wilson took what he now dubs "the Rev" on the road for a pair of tours with his folk-rock band Blackie and the Rodeo Kings. Today, he reserves the guitar for composing and recording. He and his bandmate Colin Linden decided that "anything written on the Rev should include Davis' spirit and sometimes a line lifted from his writing," Wilson says. "When Colin plays the SJ-200, Gary Davis' spirit fills the room. The guitar is a luxury liner, and I'll play it till the day I die."

AC



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